The *Barzakh* and the Bardo: Challenges to Religious Violence in Sufism and Vajrayana Buddhism

JENNIFER GREEN WOODHULL

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Sa'diyya Shaikh

Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town

DECLARATION

I, Jennifer Green Woodhull, hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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What is science? It is trying to catch a very small black cat in a very large, entirely dark room. What is philosophy? It is trying to catch a very small black cat in a very large, entirely dark room, when it is not there.

— Ernest Gellner, the *Times Literary Supplement*

Writing a doctorate is putting a tiny black cat in a large dark room and then coming back over and over to try to check if it is there.

—David Shulman, personal communication to Wendy Doniger

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, religious violence has become endemic in our world. Scholars are divided on the true motivations for such violence, however. While some perceive inherent incitements to violence embedded in religion itself, others blame other factors—primarily, competition for resources, which then co-opts religious feeling in order to justify and escalate conflict. This dissertation proposes that more fruitful answers to the riddle of religious violence may lie in the relationship between collective identity and religious allegiance.

Identity construction is liminal and, as such, experiential. Hence, this study applies the analytical lens of liminality to explore possible understandings of religious violence. Taking the position that liminal passages are natural and unavoidable aspects of lived experience, it argues that the fixation on doctrinal certainties and religious ideals common among perpetrators of religious violence functions largely to oppose the ambivalence and uncertainty characteristic of liminality. It further posits the hypothetical phenomena of reactive projection and autonomic liminality as reactions to liminal experience, leading to eruptions of violence.

The Tibetan Buddhist bardo and Sufi *barzakh* constitute religiously sanctioned instances of liminality. Although these passages are conventionally perceived as postmortem locales, both systems include broader metaphysical understandings, making their transformative potential profoundly relevant to spiritual practice during this lifetime. I argue that a close reading of the bardo and the *barzakh* demonstrates the capacity of religious tradition to offer compelling alternatives to the fixation on the extreme views typically implicated in religious violence.

I further propose that the nondualistic, inclusive worldview implicit in understandings of the bardo and *barzakh* may prove useful in promoting a practice of "reflective interiority"—not only in disrupting the rigid mindset of those moved to perpetrate religious violence, but also in shifting the moral fixity sometimes associated with the scholarship on religious violence.

Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation argues that liminality, as a naturally recurring mode of being in human dynamics, offers a useful analytical lens through which to view the phenomena we have come to call "religious violence". It uses the Tibetan Buddhist bardo and the Islamic *barzakh*[1] as examples of liminal events embedded in established religious systems.

Current scholarship indicates that the jury is out on whether religious allegiance is a proximate cause of violence. As detailed in the following chapter, some scholars make compelling arguments for religion as inherently violent; others argue as convincingly for religion as a secondary, often cynically manipulated, force in violence that is more accurately traced to nationalistic interests and/or competition for scarce resources. Still other researchers seek triggers for religious violence in evolutionary imperatives.

This dissertation does not presume to enter that debate. Rather, it drills down into the dynamics of violence, finding and exploring correspondences between religion and violence that hinge on questions of identity. My interest in personal and group identity lies in the liminal events intrinsic to its construction and maintenance, for I argue that it is precisely in liminality that religious practice, violent activity, and identity come together. This is largely because liminality opposes the dualistic worldview that often drives divisive understandings of religion, identity, and violence. As a primarily experiential passage, liminality also confounds conceptual fixation on the perceived distinctions between Us and Them that inform the reification of identity. That reification in turn fuels the arrogation of religious purity and potentially, corresponding inclinations toward violent elimination of the

[1] It appears that the term "bardo" has entered the English language sufficiently to render italicisation redundant. Francesca Fremantle (2001, 53), in her book *Luminous Emptiness: Understanding The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, acknowledges this evolution in her decision to use the Tibetan word instead of her translation, "in-between state", as she had originally intended. Nowhere in the literature reviewed for this study could I find the word in italics, except when referenced as a word or term; *barzakh*, by contrast, is typically italicised. I will follow this convention, italicising "bardo" only when referencing it as a Tibetan word.

purportedly impure Other.[2] Thus, this dissertation begins with an exploration of the coincidence of religion, identity, and violence.

Since its introduction to the academy in the early twentieth century, the study of liminality has been applied to a broad range of disciplines. The particular nature of religion—specifically, its cultural nuances, historical quarrels with post-Enlightenment rationality, capacity to inspire vehement devotion, and diverse and opposing truth-claims—makes it perhaps a more precarious area than most for the application of a given analytic lens. Accordingly, I have sought case studies in the form of explicitly liminal understandings within established religious systems.

I selected the bardo and the *barzakh* for a number of reasons. First, they are both clearly liminal in nature. Second, they fulfil the requirement for examples that are thoroughly embedded in their respective religious orthodoxies and hence largely accepted by practitioners of those traditions. And third, both the bardo and the *barzakh* are invested with profound metaphysical implications. My argument proceeds on the premise that the significance of liminality in religion gains its greatest traction in precisely these implications.

My interest in these two particular spiritual praxes is also personal. My experience as a student and teacher of Tibetan Buddhism has prompted a strong interest in the bardo. From my earliest times on the Buddhist path, I was coached to regard transitional phases as particularly rich opportunities for practice, and so developed a growing curiosity about my experience in those moments. The chance to study the bardo in an academic context has made for a powerful support to my practice.

My study of the Sufi mystic Rábi'a of Basra in my Honours thesis left me with an enduring curiosity about that religious system. In the course of that project, I became

[2] The term "the Other" is most often attributed to Edward Said, who uses it to characterise the "Them" component of the "Us-and-Them" construction (Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [London: Penguin Books, 2003], 97). Interestingly, the most concise and straightforward description of the Other in Said's work comes, not from himself, but from Anouar Abdel-Malek ("Orientalism in Crisis", Diogenes 44: 107, 1963). Said cites Abdel-Malek's description of the Oriental Other as manifesting "a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character". This description largely applies to the Other as understood in the context of this dissertation.

aware of the parallels between Sufism and Vajrayana Buddhism, which piqued my curiosity about mystical Islam's internal logics. The views of Ibn al-'Arabī, in particular, intrigued me; and the happy coincidence of my academic supervisor's specialty in Ibn al-'Arabī scholarship made my decision to pursue his understanding of the *barzakh* a natural choice.

Narrowly defined, the *barzakh* and the bardo are postmortem locations where the deceased awaits divine judgement or rebirth. However, close readings of both phenomena reveal richly nuanced understandings whose implications extend beyond the spiritual register to encompass the myriad dimensions of everyday existence. Given the historical, cultural, and geographical distances between Tibetan Buddhism and Islam, I argue that the commonalities between the *barzakh* and the bardo suggest the discovery of a deeper human reality, and that continuing exploration of this reality may potentially amplify our understanding of religion altogether. I argue further that the contrast between religious fixation and religious practice evident in both the *barzakh* and the bardo may be of specific interest to researchers in the field of religious violence.

The concept of liminality came to academic attention at the turn of the 20th century, through the discipline of anthropology. It has since demonstrated substantial value as an analytical tool in fields as varied as history, education, healthcare, political science, and international relations. In its simplest construction, "liminality" refers to the recursive periods of instability that occur naturally in the course of human experience. Scholars have found that recognising the inevitability and transformative nature of such passages has enriched their understanding of the dynamics at play in their respective disciplines. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation is the first work to propose the application of a liminal lens to the study of religious violence.

The use of liminality as an analytical tool offers the potential for radical shifts in academic approaches to the research on religious violence.As an aspect of human experience, liminality has thus worked its way ineluctably into the methodology of this study. Navigating a doctoral dissertation from the shifty ground of ambiguity and paradox has deepened my respect for the benefits of relinquishing ostensible certainty in favour of an open-ended research process. My experience in this regard prompts me to propose that researchers experiment with incorporating the paradoxical inversions of liminal dynamics into their own methodological approaches and expectations.

Methodology

My methodology is that of textual comparison. I establish the contexts of religious violence and liminality, respectively, and then devote a chapter each to the specifics of the *barzakh* and the bardo. In each case, I demonstrate the relevance of their liminal characteristics and hence their correspondences with the phenomena of religious violence. Those chapters are followed by another devoted to the comparison itself; and finally, I conclude with an overall summary of my central arguments. I draw on a broad spectrum of existing scholarship throughout, presenting rationalisations for my conclusions based on those works.

Beyond simple comparison, however, a less tidy method is in play. Here I invoke British sociologist John Law, who proposes that, while traditional academic methodologies might be effective in researching "provisionally stable realities", much of the world addressed by the social sciences is in fact decidedly unstable, if not downright chaotic (2004, 2). Consequently, Law argues that "techniques of deliberate imprecision" are frequently more properly applicable to the study of social realities (3). Law seeks methodologies suited to a fundamentally unstructured reality that he describes as "a maelstrom or tide-rip … filled with currents, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, storms, and with moments of lull and calm" (7).

This description might well be applied to the contemporary global phenomenon of religious violence, which manifests in typically unpredictable forms; erupts in apparently random locations; and involves shifting and increasingly complex interactions of social, cultural, historical, political, and religious elements. Law's description might further be argued to reflect the frequent and inevitable manifestation of liminality across the range of human experience. Consequently, I argue that Law's approach to methodology, one of "tentative and hesitant unfolding" (2004, 41–2), accords with both the study of religious violence and the use of a liminal analytical lens.

A central principle informing this dissertation is the inseparability of frame and content: that is, the profound influence of the researcher's often unquestioned assumptions on the trajectory and conclusions of her research. Here again, I cite

Law's concerns regarding the manner in which scientific method crafts perceived realities (2004, 38). Significantly, he points to the ways in which predeterminations regarding the relevance or irrelevance of respective findings—"*distinctions between 'right' and 'wrong' patterns of similarity and difference*"—affect scientific conclusions, or what Law calls "*realities*" (110; emphasis original). I argue that his use of "right" and "wrong", although employed here to convey the senses of correct and incorrect, in fact reflects my own concerns with respect to the flaws inherent in binary moral judgements. In both usages, the words suggest the acceptance or rejection of particular concepts, based on the observer's predispositions. My argument for the practice of reflective interiority among academic researchers refers. I submit further that this practice is worthy of particular consideration in the study of such volatile, variable, and alarming phenomena as instances of religious violence, where the temptation to oppose the chaos under investigation through the imposition of crisp, conclusive analyses may prove especially seductive.

Liminality is characteristically chaotic, ambiguous, and paradoxical. As an analytical tool, therefore, it perhaps qualifies as one of Law's "techniques of deliberate imprecision". My application of such techniques in this dissertation might, then, correspond to an isthmus or threshold lying between the seas of academic discovery and spiritual insight. In this liminal space, the commitment to human authenticity implicit in spiritual striving tempers the academic presumption of objective, value-free conclusions.

As this dissertation will argue, intellectual engagement alone cannot guarantee a thorough investigation of material whose essential nature extends beyond the reach of the intellect. Thoughtfully and intelligently applied, the experiential commitment characteristic of spiritual engagement can deepen a scholarly understanding of more esoteric or metaphysically charged material.

At the same time, scholarly rigour opposes such tacit biases as may arise from spiritual devotion. The conventions of academic discovery, when applied with due recognition of the scholar's personal positionalities, can act to contain spiritual fervour when the latter threatens to override factual challenges to literalism, idealism, or outright superstition.

Hence, it could be said that the isthmus dividing academic method from spiritual

engagement consists precisely in the self-awareness each side brings to its own understanding, in tandem with the respect of each for the intelligence of the other. I propose that the extraordinary scholarship of such spiritual masters as Ibn al-ʻArabī and Chögyam Trungpa, as expounded in this dissertation, confirm the power generated by such meetings of the spiritual and the academic. Their example inspires my own endeavours to apply intellectual rigour to such spiritual understanding as I have attained over thirty-five years of Buddhist practice and study.

The relationship between any two comparands is, as implied by the analysis proposed above, always subject to a third element: the researcher's own understanding. Wendy Doniger calls this "the invisible third side in the eternal triangle of the comparison of any two other things". Far from being suspect on account of its subjective nature, this element is both requisite and significant. It is subjective, to be sure, yet its "arbitrariness is limited by our responsibility to the data" (1998, 36–7). Perhaps, then, if subjectivity is implicated in both personal spirituality and "responsibility to the data" in academic rigour, the "invisible third side" represents, again, the isthmus that both unites and separates the two. My method, in this dissertation, is to represent that third side with as much responsibility and imagination as have proven available to me. The result will, of course, not be "a single prize of Truth" (36) but rather an invitation to further exploration.

Law argues that method is, "most fundamentally, about a way of being" (2004, 10). This dissertation explores modes of being as fruitful ways of understanding both religion and religious violence. I argue that to be faithful to both my thesis and my Buddhist commitment, my academic practice must likewise reflect an approach that values practice over conclusion, and uncertainty over resolution.[3] I aspire to live up to both Doniger's "responsibility to the data" and Law's "way of being". This approach lies at the heart of my methodology, and indeed, of this dissertation altogether.

[3] The study of religion does not, of course, require religious commitment of any kind. However, attention to the relationship between scholarly work and personal integrity must underlie any meaningful academic project.

Religious Violence

The study begins with an exploration of religious violence.[4] In examining the term "religion", I locate my research in the Western tradition of European post-Enlightenment thinking, grounding it in the foundational work of E.B. Tylor, Emile Durkheim, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. As scholars such as Jonathan Z. Smith and Brad Gregory argue, the notion of religion as a discrete class of human experience is itself a Western invention. Based on this understanding alone, it is difficult to examine the phenomenon from any other cultural perspective.[5]

That said, this dissertation draws its data from two non-Western traditions invested with their own genealogies for the understanding of "religion". The limitations of a doctoral dissertation preclude the ability to do justice to the full implications of this fact. While none of these explanations is intended to deny my own embeddedness in a Western worldview, I have made a conscious attempt throughout this study to recognise the bias inherent in my intellectual positionality and to apply the appropriate correctives.

The scholarship on religious violence is vast and varied. In navigating the field, I avail myself of R. Scott Appleby's helpful categories of "strong", "weak", and "pathological" religionists.[6] Strong religionists, such as Mark Juergensmeyer, Charles Selengut, Jan Assmann, and Regina M. Schwartz, are those for whom religion unambiguously contains the seeds of violence. Weak religionists consider religion an important but secondary factor in violent conflict. Those whose views I have cited in this context include William T. Cavanaugh, Karen Armstrong, and Jyrki Käkönen. Pathological religionists—Robert Jay Lifton and Charles B. Strozier among them—argue for psychological disturbance as a significant driver of religious violence.

My own view falls largely in the weak religionist camp, in that I do not perceive religion as a proximate cause of that violence attributed to religious conflict. Rather,

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[4] As Chapter Two makes clear, I consider the term "religious violence" imprecise and potentially misleading. I employ it throughout this dissertation, however, specifically as referencing a field of academic study. I do so in the interests of avoiding both the syntactic inelegance and the implied pedantry that might taint routine repetitions of qualifiers such as "so-called", "purported", and so forth.

[5] "Culture" is itself a Western concept (Saler 2000, 8), indicating the virtual impossibility of a Western-trained researcher escaping the hall of mirrors represented by her own orientation. That said, as indicated later in this chapter, this study proceeds to propose a practice calculated to at least ventilate this conundrum.

[6] Appleby (2015, 42) is careful to avoid reduction to oversimplified categories, proposing that these characterisations represent points on a continuum, rather than fixed positionalities. Indeed, the views of such scholars as Hector Avalos and John Teehan encourage a nuanced appreciation of Appleby's taxonomy.

I argue for identity as a more powerful factor in such violence. In this respect, I draw on studies of terrorism by Jessica Stern and of radicalisation by Ric Coolsaet; evolutionary and cognitive factors explored by John Teehan and Loyal Rue; and Vamik Volkan's research on the formation and maintenance of group identity. I conclude that the imperative of allegiance to a collective—a family of purportedly like-minded others—constitutes a more powerful inducement to defensive violence than do doctrinal quarrels, opposing truth-claims, or competing interpretations of historical tradition.

Building on the dynamics of group identity, I specifically cite a dualistic, Us-and-Them worldview as a primary driver of religious violence. I argue that the exclusionary nature of this worldview not only cultivates the conditions for conflict, but is itself an expression of violence.

Liminality

My third chapter proceeds to an examination of liminality, specifically as proposed by Arnold van Gennep in his work on tripartite rites of passage, and further elucidated by Victor W. Turner. Although both men were anthropologists, a survey of recent scholarship on liminality indicates that Turner's work on the "threshold" or "liminal" phase of the rites of passage, in particular, has been applied in a wide range of academic fields.

In defining and characterising liminality, I cite Bjørn Thomassen and Arpad Szakolczai as arguably pre-eminent among current scholars in this field. They are, notwithstanding, part of a much larger community of researchers that includes Agnes Horvath, Harald Wydra, Maria Mälksoo, and Bernhard Giesen. In their respective fields, these and other scholars have demonstrated that the chaotic inversion of familiar norms characteristic of liminality, while typically distressing, is in fact essential to transformation. They further establish the value of factoring the cyclical manifestation of liminal events into an understanding of the dynamics governing personal and social realities.

The primary goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the utility of liminality as an analytical lens. I argue that it is especially applicable to studies of religion—and particularly, of religious experience. This is because the scholarship on liminality

demonstrates that liminal events are inextricably implicated in the structure of human experience altogether. My argument foregrounds religion as a largely (although not exclusively) experiential phenomenon, and thus especially apposite to examination though a liminal lens.

Returning to the relationship between violence and identity construction, I note the centrality of a dualistic worldview to both phenomena. I draw on the work of Szakolczai and Alberto Melucci to indicate the liminal dynamics central to identity construction. Liminality having thus been invoked in connection with both religion and identity, I argue for its particular relevance to the study of religious violence.

Finally, I propose two possible scenarios that come into focus through a liminal analysis: reactive projection, a reflexive rejection or denial of the threat of liminality through blaming the associated distress on the demonised Other; and autonomic liminality, in which compulsive attempts to repress the threat of approaching chaos result in an irrepressible eruption of the liminal event in the form of violence. I do not necessarily argue for the soundness or practical application of either hypothesis. Rather, I offer them as examples of the analytical use of liminality in the study of religious violence. In so doing, I invite other scholars to experiment with the use of liminality as an exploratory tool in their own research.

The Barzakh

Chapter Four introduces the Islamic *barzakh*, proceeding to examine it specifically from the viewpoint of thirteenth-century Sufi philosopher and theologian Ibn al-‘Arabī’. The Qur’ān contains three scant Qur’anic references to the *barzakh* as a postmortem limbo, but on this ground Ibn al-‘Arabī constructs an extensive metaphysical argument that uses the concept to explain the relationship between humanity and the Divine. In the process, he offers a startling view of the nature of reality, featuring the *barzakh* as a central element.

Al-‘Arabī’s brilliance and spiritual accomplishment earned him the honorific title of “Shaykh al-Akbar” (the Greatest Master). A prolific author, he is believed to

have written at least eight hundred works. Of the 550 or so extant, *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* (*Meccan Revelations*) offers his most fully developed exposition of the *barzakh* and its role in human affairs. I make extensive use of William C. Chittick's translation of and commentaries on this work. I also avail myself of Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fusûs al-Hikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*), as translated and expounded upon by James W. Morris and Binyamin Abrahamov.

Others whose research and insight into Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh* prove indispensable to this chapter include Salman H. Bashir and Titus Burckhardt. For insight into the Sufi philosophy central to Ibn al-'Arabī's thinking, I consult Annemarie Schimmel and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. For the larger Islamic context, I draw on the works of Majid Fakhry and Shahab Ahmed.

My main task in this chapter is to establish the *barzakh* as a liminal space. This might seem a foregone conclusion; however, my argument requires a close examination of the liminal characteristics established in the previous chapter in order to demonstrate the significance of a liminal event as specifically embedded in a longstanding religious praxis. I make a case for the naturalness of this juxtaposition, and hence for the relevance of liminality in the context of religious studies.

This chapter further introduces the Sufi notion of the *waqt*. The word, typically translated as "the moment", references a heightened, immediate experience of presence attainable through spiritual practice. As a *barzakh*, the *waqt* reflects the experiential nature of the liminal, which in turn challenges ideological, theological, and historical fixation. Accordingly, I demonstrate that Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh* locates the disruption and instability characteristic of liminality at the heart of an established and respected spiritual imaginary that, by its nature, rejects fixed reference points. I suggest that wider recognition of this analysis might prove useful in ventilating the static worldview typical of those fixated religionists frequently implicated in religious violence.

I further argue that this same ventilation may benefit the scholarship on religious violence. Here, I suggest that a reflexive rejection of violence—and by extension,

its perpetrators—may prejudicially nuance our research. This may not be the only fixation troubling academic analysis of the problem, for as human beings, we scholars are not immune to the influence of unquestioned assumptions. Turning the analytical lens of liminality toward our own work, therefore, could help clarify issues that may otherwise obstruct the development of badly needed solutions.

The Bardo

This chapter introduces the Tibetan Buddhist bardo, which closely parallels the Sufi *barzakh* in both its vernacular sense of a postmortem limbo and its more metaphysical application to the human condition. I continue the previous chapter's discussion regarding the implications of liminality as embedded in a religious tradition. My main resource with respect to traditional understandings of the bardo is the *Bardo Thötröl,* a text that translator W.Y. Evans-Wentz titled (inaccurately) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.* Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa made their own translation of the Tibetan original, and their version is my source of choice. Fremantle, Trungpa, Donald S. Lopez, Jr., and Sogyal Rinpoche offer historical context and learned commentary on this work. Tibetan cultural and spiritual context is provided largely by Matthew Kapstein and Karma Lekshe Tsomo.

The bardo as liminal event invites the practitioner to embody a mode of being whose accomplishment entails significant existential risk. In this, I note the similarities between the Buddhist *anātman* and the Sufi notion of *fanā,* which designate the absence, and thus the loss, of the ego-self. Such loss is intensified by the incapacity of the intellect to fix it in a conceptual frame: it is, after all, a mode of being as opposed to an ideological stance. I argue that the associated disruption to identity reinforces the notion, mentioned earlier, that perpetrators of violence may reflexively attempt to evade the approach of an unavoidable liminal passage.

Another parallel between the *barzakh* and the bardo consists in the "fourth moment" of the bardo, which is roughly equivalent to the *waqt*. In both cases, the liminal event entails a heightened awareness of immediate presence, or what Trungpa calls an "experience of nowness" (1992, 3). This moment is devoid of the familiar reference points that usually link the past to the present and imply a trajectory into the future. Offering neither comfort nor closure, it deprives its subject of reassuring certainties.

The implied existential risk is once again apparent, and with it, the potential for violent resistance. The significance of the bardo as a mode of being, as opposed to an ideological positionality, proves central to my argument.

The chapter concludes with the suggestion that the very existence of the bardo and the *barzakh* as established religious imaginaries challenges the binary thinking that fuels exclusionary violence.

Integrations and Resonances

Chapter Six, "Integrations and Resonances", examines the trajectory set in motion by the previous chapters. In exploring deeper levels of arguments already made, I draw on the spiritual insights of masters such as Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī and Chögyam Trungpa, as well as the scholarship of James W. Jones, Charles Kimball, James Mensch, and Jason A. Springs, among others. Theologian Paul Tillich provides helpful reflections from the Christian tradition.

Returning to the topics of dualism, exclusivity, and hierarchical ranking, I again establish their implication in the construction and maintenance of collective identity and the corresponding Us-versus-Them mindset.

The chapter proposes the central necessity of reflective interiority, or the deliberate cultivation of radical self-awareness. I demonstrate that ideals of warriorship and courage in both Sufism and Vajrayana Buddhism emphasise such internal awareness and further, that the practice of reflective interiority entails the personal vulnerability attendant on liminal ambiguities and uncertainties. I apply this argument to the scholarship on religious violence, suggesting again an embrace of liminality in the very process of applying a liminal lens to the academic investigation.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter returns to the question of identity, arguing that the dualism underlying identity construction and maintenance is powerfully implicated in violence. I argue that the particular potency of religion as a marker of identity adds weight to the correspondences between identity and religious violence. The

recognition of identity as a liminal dynamic, rather than a fixed quantity, further attests to the relevance of liminality in analyses of religious violence.

I argue throughout the dissertation for the primacy of experience in understanding religious allegiance. In the case of violence, in particular, the role of experience as a liminal event can add dimension to the research on religious conflict. Here, the practice of immediate presence, as implicated in both the bardo and the *barzakh*, underscores the importance of reflective interiority.

The concluding chapter further contrasts the role of language with that of experience, and suggests that the rich metaphors found in both Sufi and Vajrayana literature may help loosen practitioners' grip on the literalism associated with the fixated religious stances implicated in religious violence.

The chapter proceeds to explore three characteristics of liminality—the accommodation of extremes, enantiodromia, and paradox—which, I argue, are particularly relevant to the study of religious violence. In examining the indivisibility of unity and separation embodied in the liminal event, I demonstrate that differentiation between religious groups is paradoxically necessary to the unification of their respective aspirations, and hence, at least theoretically, to a mitigation of hostilities between them. Here, the significance of experience as a basis for action, and specifically for interaction, is made apparent. With respect to my comparison of the *barzakh* and the bardo, this chapter examines the liminal space between the comparands. The simultaneous unifying and separating functions of this threshold or isthmus help elucidate the paradox of liminality.

Finally, I again urge scholars to consider the utility of a liminal lens in deepening our understanding of religious violence. I further suggest that the inclusive nature of liminality might help break down binary assumptions regarding the nature of violence, arguing that such assumptions might confound a more multidimensional view of our academic pursuit. Accordingly, I encourage my reader to experiment with applying the practice of reflective interiority to the study of religious violence.

Chapter Two: Religious Violence

> Religion has once again become a force that no government can safely ignore. Fundamentalism … is now an essential part of the modern scene and will certainly play an important role in the domestic and international affairs of the future.
> —Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God*

What is "religious violence", other than a catch phrase routinely applied to any conflict in which religious differences are implicated? In this chapter, I will argue that the term "religious violence" is both a misnomer that reflects political and academic imprecision, rather than rigorous examination, and an ultimately dangerous notion that contributes more to the problem of global violence than to any conceivable solution.

If violence cannot be unequivocally attributed to religious differences, as I argue, other causes must clearly be sought. Theoretical studies of violence point to various such causes, competition for resources prominent among them.[7] A less common view links violence with issues of identity. This chapter explores the latter view, with particular attention to the interface of identity with religion—and specifically, the relationship of this interface to violence. Scholars such as Malise Ruthven, Anthony D. Smith, and Catarina Kinnvall are among those I will cite in this regard.

I will argue that the violence attributed to religious conflict derives primarily from threats to group identity. I will further demonstrate that religion is a particularly powerful basis for group identity. Consequently, while violent reactions to such threats are frequently attributed to religion, I submit that they serve primarily to defend the group identity, a complex matrix in which religion is intimately woven.

What Is Religion?

In this section, I will explore a range of scholarly understandings of religion to argue that it cannot reasonably be singled out as a proximate cause of violence. My argument is based on (a) the absence of a satisfactory definition of religion; and

[7] See, for example, Armstrong 2014, Avalos 2005, and Käkönen 1986.

(b) the fact that religious allegiance is inextricably interwoven with multiple other societal phenomena. I will further argue that the peculiarly indeterminate nature of religion makes it especially vulnerable to co-optation by stronger influences—political power not least among them. I propose that institutionalised religion and political power are so intertwined that to separate the two in the attribution of violence is intellectually incoherent and ethically disingenuous.

Defining Religion

Whether or not religion is, indeed, a proximate cause of violence, the mere designation of religious violence requires that both words be clearly understood. In making even the most preliminary gestures toward seeking a definition of religion, however, we are immediately confronted with a deeply complex history, whose effects continue to vex both popular and academic understandings today. This section offers a brief overview of the debates attendant on diverse Western definitions and histories of religion.

British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor famously reduces religion to "the belief in spiritual beings" (Tweed 2005, 271). Contemporary scholar of religion Hector Avalos follows Tylor's tradition in proposing that religion is based on a presumed relationship with "unverifiable forces and/or beings" (2005, 19; see also Teehan 2010, 46). For Friedrich Schleiermacher, religion is "sense and taste for the Infinite": an experiential phenomenon, rather than an intellectual or conceptual one (1893, 34).

According to Emile Durkheim, "[r]eligious beliefs proper are always shared by a definite group that professes them and that practices the corresponding rites" ([1912] 1995, 41). This statement brings together three elements of religion: doctrine ("religious beliefs"), community ("shared by a … group"), and ritual ("the corresponding rites"). Durkheim sees religion as a "living social reality" that governs communal identity and morality (Lynch 2012).

This chapter will take up the notion of group identity as a driving force in religious allegiance. Yet the role of doctrine has proven as powerful, at least in contemporary fundamentalist movements, as has the appeal of religious identity. Indeed, the term "fundamentalist" originated in an insistence on the literal interpretation of Christian

scripture (Armstrong 2000). Thus, the doctrinal component of religion must be included in the definition employed in this dissertation.

It is not my intention to offer my own definition of religion. In the specific context of religious violence, rather, I propose that the most useful definition is that which foregrounds doctrine and group identity.

Religion and the Academy

Academic understandings of religion have inevitably driven research beyond mere definitions, into speculation regarding its origins—and, more pertinent in the context of this dissertation, into the ways scholars have perceived religion and its place in society and culture. This section will demonstrate that academic understandings of religion are profoundly influenced by historical trends regarding intellectual frameworks, socio-cultural developments, and political power.

Origins of Religion

Philosopher of religion John Teehan reports that archaeologists have traced the fundamental elements of religious practice to the Upper Palaeolithic period, as long as forty thousand years ago (2015, 16). He traces some raw components of religious understanding—the perception of unseen, intentional agents, for example—to the most fundamental survival imperatives negotiated by early *homo sapiens* (2017, 661). Scholar of religion and philosophy Loyal Rue submits that the forms common to all religions in fact "indicate species traits" antecedent to historical or cultural developments (2005, 10).

Friedrich Schleiermacher believes that religious feeling is innate to humanity: indeed, that "a province of its own in the mind belong to it" (1893, 24). A more contemporary version of this approach posits a "God gene" that is hardwired in the human makeup (Hamer 2005). Scholar of religion William T. Cavanaugh traces the view of Schleiermacher and Hamer to Renaissance thinkers such as Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino. Both departed from the medieval view of religion as a lifestyle informed by scripturally inspired morality, arguing instead that it is a universal human impulse (2009, 71).

Tylor and Scottish anthropologist James G. Frazer propose the so-called

"intellectualist" theory that religion arises from the mind's compulsion to seek explanations for the inexplicable (Boyer 2001, 14). This view evolved from a shift already underway during the eighteenth century, when the European Enlightenment began glossing religion as a system of conceptual beliefs (Smith 1962, 71).

Many scholars have noted that as "a great objective something" (Smith 1962, 25), religion is an invention of the European Enlightenment.[8] Scholar of Islam Shahab Ahmed argues persuasively that the very category of "religion" is shaped by an Enlightenment-era understanding of "European Christianity with its socio-political location constitutive of modernity" (2016, 180). From this perspective, any academic definition of religion is fundamentally prejudiced in favour of a specifically modern Western worldview. Indeed, epistemologist Benson Saler remarks that "[r]eligion is a Western folk category that contemporary Western scholars have appropriated" (2000, vii). In his view, Western scholarship on religion is heavily and unwittingly influenced by culturally promoted understandings imbibed by scholars from early childhood. British scholar of comparative religion Gavin Flood concludes that no definitive description of religion is ultimately possible (1999, 47).[9]

Whatever the provenance of religion, however, Jonathan Z. Smith famously asserts that it "is solely the creation of the scholar's study … It has no independent existence apart from the academy" (1982, xi). If religion is nothing but an intellectual fabrication, therefore, historian Thomas A. Tweed argues that it must be accountable to intellectual analysis (2005, 256).[10] This argument derives from a tradition established by such venerable scholars as Weber, Durkheim, and Freud, which draws any exploration of religious experience into a conceptual framework whose terms of reference explicitly reject the lived experience of religious actors (Gregory 2009, 26).

Philosopher John Ralston Saul, however, cautions that reason is hardly neutral or

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[8] See, for example, Cavanaugh 1995, 398; Ochs 2015, 491–2; andTweed 2005, 259.

[9] Flood (1999, 47) does, nonetheless, propose that religion may be understood as "*value-laden narratives and behaviours that bind people to their objectives, to each other, and to non-empirical claims and beings*" (emphasis original).

[10] Tweed is citing David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 304.

objective: the Nazi Holocaust, for example, "was a perfectly rational act" (1992, 58). This view calls into question the functionality of intellectual reasoning as a universal measure of human moral action. Historian Brad Gregory, in fact, suggests that approaching the content of religious writings with "the proper (post)modern, secular intellectual equipment" will do little more than guarantee agreement with prevailing academic assumptions (2009, 32).

I propose that the debate over the academic standing of religion stands on shaky ground: namely, the assumption that religion exists as a discrete realm of human activity. As historians such as John Coffey and Alister Chapman have observed, this view is a product of modernity, and as such, ignores millennia of lived pre-Enlightenment experience (2009, 5). It also assumes a dualistic understanding peculiar to Western thought, which privileges reason, rationality, and mental processes over emotions, faith, and sense experience (Plumwood 1993, 19). To promote these assumptions as valid grounds for an understanding of religion strikes me as intellectually inadequate and ethically questionable.

The Western View of Religion: A Brief History

Western assumptions regarding religion include the perception that it occupies a clearly bounded space outside of other social endeavours (Teehan 2015, 13). Allegiance to a particular religion is further thought to imply identification with a collective that comprises "us", beyond whose boundaries all others are "them" (14; Boyer 2001, 265). This understanding, as will become apparent, is of central importance to the argument of this dissertation.

Yet such assumptions are not common to all societies and cultures. Moreover, the notion of belonging to a single religion is also not universal. In Java, for example, anthropologist Pascal Boyer has noted that a given individual may subscribe to any number of creeds, switching freely between them in dependence on social conditions and prevailing political winds (2001, 269).

Gregory reports that "religion", as Westerners understand it today, traces its origins specifically to the Dutch Republic during the early seventeenth century. Several conditions contributed to this development, among them liberal Dutch attitudes to

confessional diversity; the unifying power of growing material affluence; and pluralistic interpretations of Christianity ushered in by the Protestant Reformation (2012, 373–4). The influence of shifts in Christian mores is key to modern Western understandings of religion altogether, since at the time of the Reformation, Christianity was essentially employed as a template for defining religion in general (Teehan 2015, 3).

Prior to Luther's theological revolution, religious truth-claims were imbricated in elite religious scholarship and academic knowledge—this in the Jewish and Muslim realms, as well as the Christian. After Martin Luther proclaimed the right of individual believers to their own scriptural understandings, however, the academy lost its status as an authoritative adjudicator of increasingly contradictory biblical interpretations (Gregory 2012, 304–5). Now, religious practitioners no longer needed theologians to interpret the Bible, nor priests to mediate their relationship with the Divine.

At around the same time, shifting socio-political influences on European thought began demanding more precise philosophical and sociological analysis. Thinkers responded by separating faith from reason and intellect from emotion.[11] Accordingly, universities began distinguishing theology from other academic disciplines—a tendency amplified by the most powerful Catholic and Protestant churches of the day. These institutions leveraged their political power to privilege theological studies and suppress doctrinal debate (Gregory 2012, 304–5).

This same historical period saw a thriving of scientific and philosophical enquiry in new academies. Europe's leading universities had meanwhile become theological islands, driving the pursuit and production of secular knowledge beyond their walls. Increasingly insulated, theologians lacked the skills to engage in robust academic debate, further deepening the chasm between the religious and secular realms. This rift was not due to any innate incompatibility between these realms, but to "an inculturated incapacity" to perceive their commonalities (Gregory 2012, 305).

[11] Philosopher Val Plumwood (1993, 43) suggests that while some dualisms (e.g., reason vs. nature) may predate the historical record, those mentioned here are most congruent with post-Enlightenment understanding.

By the nineteenth century, European rationalist orthodoxy had come to conflate theology with anti-intellectualism—a view that continues to influence Western understandings of religion. An undercurrent detectable in many contemporary works privileges secularism with a monopoly on intellectual rigour, by implication consigning religion to the realm of superstition and wishful thinking.[12]

The Enlightenment introduced the idea that religious commitment and rational analysis are mutually exclusive, such that religious actors are driven by flawed reasoning (Cavanaugh 2009, 205). Contemporary Western debates about religious violence continue to be characterised by the tendency to separate the practice of religion from the exercise of a discriminating intellect. Modern Western understandings specifically assert the superiority of the reasoning mind over natural experience (Plumwood 1993, 42).[13] Accordingly, political and intellectual elites often attribute to religious actors "a state of cognitive dissonance", increasing societal and psychological stress on them by trivialising or rejecting the beliefs and values they hold sacred (Selengut 2003, 65).

Yet some secular actors have been known to demonstrate an almost religious devotion to their own socio-economic doctrines. Ahmed points out that belief in capitalism, liberalism, secularism, and the like is, like religious commitment, based on professions of faith. These include declarations of purportedly "self-evident" truths, such as the equality of men (sic) proclaimed in the American Constitution. Such truth-claims, Ahmed argues, are as "empirically-unverifiable and pseudo-rational" as is any scriptural dictum (2016, 181). Indeed, scholar of religion Timothy Fitzgerald argues that religious and secular ideologies are cut from the same conceptual cloth:

> Worship of capital, disguised as the science of economics, is an example of what anthropologists and religionists used to call

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[12] This line of thought is exemplified in Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam, 2006); Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006); and *Christopher Hitchens, God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007).

[13] Plumwood (1993, 43) lists phenomena such as "reason", "rationality", and "mind" as dualistically opposed—and implicitly superior—to "nature", "body", and "emotion" in modern Western culture. Particularly in the wake of the European Enlightenment, she argues, the former set has been routinely accorded higher social and cultural value.

> animism—belief in the independent autonomy of the products of the collective imagination. (Fitzgerald 2007, x)

From this perspective, economics is indistinguishable from religion in its social implications. Both demand of believers a leap of faith in conceptual constructs divorced from lived experience.

Pre-Enlightenment Europeans might have been surprised to encounter such distinctions and comparisons, for they were not called upon to differentiate their religious commitments from the imperatives of everyday social and political life (Armstrong 2014, 236). Ecclesiastical and civil authority were understood to constitute "a single body", with the Church at its head (Cavanaugh 2009, 400). Social and political developments during the sixteenth century, however, inverted that hierarchy. This movement culminated in the Peace of Westphalia, which is widely held to mark the birth of the modern nation-state (Little 2015, 67–8). Now civil rulers replaced religious leaders in assuming the pinnacle of social command. From there, it was a relatively short step to eliminating the Church from the public sphere altogether (Cavanaugh 2009, 400).

The separation of an intellectual or logical worldview from religious conviction falls especially heavily on the Muslim world, which is often accused of confusing the political and religious domains. The implication is that the Islamic understanding of reality, because religiously informed, is irrational, illogical, and emotionally driven (Manzoor 2005). When this approach is designated as the binary opposite of rational, logical, intellectually driven secular understanding, the application of Islamic law to perceived non-religious activities is glossed as inappropriate.

However, *dīn* (religion) and *dawla* (politics) are clearly distinct in Islamic thought. Judeo-Christian confusion on this score lies in the normalisation of inherited European structural relationships between these realms, which do not necessarily reflect Islamic understanding. Early Muslims were disinclined to perceive such realms of activity as discrete or mutually exclusive (Hirschkind 1997; Ahmed 2016, 187). Concepts of religion, secularity, and politics derived from European Enlightenment thought are not always applicable to Islamic traditions that evolved under conditions historically imbued with their own culturally contextualised

understandings of human activity.

Religion and Power

I have argued, above, that religion cannot be separated from the other societal and cultural currents in force at any given time and in any given place.[14] Political interests, in particular, are frequently implicated in religious movements. The Crusades represent a case in point: although religious fervour was certainly a powerful factor in these bloody rampages, they were arguably as much motivated by Pope Urban II's political aspirations (Armstrong 2014, 398).

Cavanaugh argues that the designation of "religion" to one or other system of beliefs and practices is a reflection of the power dynamics in play at the time and place of such designation. "Religion", in his view, "is a term that constructs and is constructed by different kinds of political configurations" (2009, 58). Certainly, Michel Foucault would agree. For him, the individual subject comes to her religious and other commitments entirely by dint of social, cultural, and political forces. Personal beliefs, opinions, aspirations, and behaviours are not expressions of autonomous processes, but are shaped by the "relations of power" in play at a given historical moment (1982).

As stated earlier, a definition of religion is required for any thoughtful investigation of religious violence. The origins of and reasons for religious commitment, on the other hand, seem not particularly relevant to that investigation. I argue that doctrine and community—that is, identification with a group of religious compatriots—are the factors most pertinent in cases where religion is invoked to justify violent action. The ratio of each to each invariably differs under diverse circumstances: the lure of group identity, however, appears to hold particular sway in such cases. This theme will be explored later in this chapter.

What Is Violence?

Violence, the other half of the "religious violence" question, is—like religion—

[14] This is of course not an original argument. See Fitzgerald 2000 for a cogent critique of academic religious studies, based on its failure to recognise the inseparability of religion and sociopolitical power dynamics.

subject to a range of definitions. Legal scholar Quraysha Ismail Sooliman attributes this lack of consensus to the diverse conditions, actions, and dynamics that give rise to violent behaviour, and cautions that any definition will inevitably affect interpretations of the lived experience of those who encounter it (2017, viii). Somewhat in line with Foucault's view of power relations, Hector Avalos defines violence as "the act of modifying and/or inflicting pain upon the human body in order to express or impose power differentials" (2005, 19). Anthropologists Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern define violence as "harmful acts whose legitimacy is contested or ambivalent" (2013, 376). The ambivalence referenced here reflects the liminal nature of violence, which will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

The word "violence" is commonly understood in the context of its etymological sibling, "violation". Violence, from this perspective, is the violation of another's person, property, and/or right to conduct themselves as free social subjects. Obviously, being deprived of one's life or physical agency would qualify in this sense as violation. The question arises, then: what prompts people to violate one another?

I have argued elsewhere that violence is dependent on two primary components: aggression and a dualistic worldview (Woodhull 2017). Religious traditions frequently proclaim their opposition to aggression—from Jesus' "turn the other cheek" and the declaration of Islam's first caliph, Abū Bakr, that "God purified Islam and the Muslims from rashness and excessive wrath" to the belief, in certain African traditional religions, that the supreme deity abandoned humankind precisely because of its aggressive tendencies.[15] More recent examples of spiritual remedies for aggression include those offered by diverse religious traditions and practitioners.[16]

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[15] The cited biblical verse is Matthew 5:39. The King James Bible renders it as follows: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Abū Bakr's declaration is quoted by Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Introduction", in *Islam and Nonviolence,* ed. Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Sarah Gilliat (Honolulu: Center for Global Nonviolence, 2011), 11. The reference to African traditional religion can be found in Nathalie Wlodarczyk, "African Traditional Religion and Violence", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, 155.

[16] Examples include Thich Nhat Hanh, *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames* (NewYork: Riverhead Books, 2001);Wayne A. Mack, *Anger and Stress Management God's Way* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2017); and Rabbi Avraham Tubolsky, *Remove Anger from Your Heart: A Torah Guide to Patience, Tolerance, and Emotional Well Being,* trans. Zev Reichman (New York: The Judaica Press, 2017).

Nor are antidotes to aggression confined to the realm of religion. A search for "anger management" in amazon.com's books section in December, 2017 turned up no fewer than 101 pages of offerings. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that in the industrialised West, at any rate, aggression has been recognised as problematic, and continues to be thoroughly addressed from multiple angles.

Dualism, which I argue constitutes the other primary ingredient of violence, is not as easily distinguished from normal human discourse, for it lies at the heart of Western cognitive understanding (Wilber 2001, 6).[17] Thoroughly normalised as dualistic thinking is, this perceptual mode is not widely considered detrimental to accepted social mores. I have in my own work argued that the dualistic worldview is not, in itself, necessarily problematic. I have further submitted that even the tendency to rank the entities separated by such thinking need not inevitably lead to violent conduct. Rather, I propose that violence may subsist precisely in the exclusion of the non-preferred binary (Woodhull 2017; see also Schwartz 1997, 5 and Jamieson and Orr 2009, 134).

Violence and the Academy

The argument that religion is hardwired into the human psyche is echoed in the scholarship on violence. Among those promoting this approach is historian John Docker, who considers violence a legacy of our descent from intrinsically belligerent primates (2008, 7). Walter Benjamin declares that "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" ([1955] 2007, 256). From this perspective, violence is an unavoidable corollary of humanity's historical evolution—"collateral damage", as modern military spokespersons might call it, of perceived social progress.

Sociologist and peace researcher Johan Galtung offers a typology of three types of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. This schema provides a helpful lens through

[17] By "dualism" I mean the tendency to assume that all phenomena may be divided into two basic categories (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "dualism", accessed November 1, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017 /entries/dualism/).

which to contemplate the effects of violence on social systems. Direct violence, according to this breakdown, includes explicit physical insults such as killing or maiming, but also the misery inflicted by means of military siege and economic sanctions. Structural violence is characterised by exploitation, and manifests more as process than event.[18] Cultural violence is "a substratum from which the other two can derive their nutrients"—neither event nor process, but a kind of undercurrent governing the expression of both direct and structural violence. It consists in the customary norms and collective mindset of a given community. The causal chain can begin in any of these three forms of violence, or indeed in any combination thereof (1990, 293–5).

Monotheism and Violence

Galtung is one of several scholars who argue that violence is rooted in the ground of Abrahamic religion. For him, the notion of an external, transcendent deity is a "catastrophic idea". The invention of God Most High inevitably leads to the creation of his opposite—Satan Most Low—to represent the other extreme of the dualistic spectrum. This arrangement represents a metaphorical template whose implications pervade every aspect of social configuration (1990, 296–7). Rhetorician William O. Saas concurs. The "garb of religion" assumed by the seventeenth-century European state ineluctably conferred on secular affairs the binaries of good/God and evil/Satan (2012, 70). Saas argues further that these tropes were necessary in order to galvanise the citizenry against perceived outsider/enemies (2012, 70).

Regina M. Schwartz attributes violent exclusion to the exclusive allegiance demanded by a monotheistic deity. For her, this dynamic lends an ominous cast to the secular notion of "one nation under God" (1997, xi). This view suggests an inevitable progression from the adoption of moral binaries to the development of a group identity, culminating in the violent exclusion of designated outsiders.

Yet such arguments fail to account for the incidence of violence prior to the establishment of the Abrahamic religions. Docker, for example, reports that the rise

[18] Armstrong (2014, 53) refers to "the inescapable structural violence of civilized life". Presumably, from this perspective, civilisation itself generates the process to which Galtung refers.

of agricultural-commercial societies, as long as four to six thousand years before the common era, occasioned widespread violence against hunter-gatherer societies (2008, 8). This gloss appears to echo Virgil's identification, in the *Aeneid,* of the hero Aeneas with agricultural interests in Rome's triumph over the "savage" hunter-gatherers (Waswo 1997, xi). Such events would have predated the birth of Judaism—and thus, the emergence of Abrahamic religion—by more than a millennium.

Wherever violence first appeared in human development, however, it seems in every case to be linked to identification with a group of insiders mutually committed to the exclusion, if not the eradication, of perceived outsiders. Docker, for example, documents the leap from group identity to violence in the French Revolution (2008, 191). Indeed, the motivational power of religious identity is especially potent when invoked to resist political oppression (Ruthven 2004, 197). I would add that the potency of religious identity further applies to the justification of political oppression.

Again, as with religion, the origins of violence are less pertinent to this study than are its manifestations, specifically in the context of its relationship to religion. Hence my own definition of violence—as the sum of aggression and dualism—will suffice, at least for the purposes of this chapter.

Does "Religious Violence" Exist?

The term "religious violence" has been applied so broadly that a clear, consensual definition seems no longer possible. This section will offer an overview of the dominant strands of thinking on the topic, concluding that the designation of "religious violence" may represent an instance of the "[distortion] into clarity" lamented by John Law. I argue, further, that such mistaken confidence in the designation complicates efforts to bring true clarity to the phenomenon itself.

Some scholars believe that religion, by its nature, is a peculiarly compelling motivation for violent aggression. From this perspective, the rules of logic, judgement, and behaviour governing ordinary conduct—and thus presumably inhibiting violence—are no match for a mandate perceived as divinely originated (Selengut 2003, 6). Yet this point fails to account for the contextual factors—social,

political, psychological, etc.—that may drive religious actors to interpret their divine mandate as commanding violence. It further fails to address the preponderance of non-violent over violent adherents of a given identical doctrine.

For Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, "[t]he dark attraction between religion and violence is endemic to religious traditions" (2013, 1). Juergensmeyer argues that the notion of a cosmic war between good and evil underlies "the transcendent moralism … and the ritual intensity" characteristic of religiously motivated violence (2000, 10).[19] The dualism implicit in this notion is, I submit, inseparable from the Us-and-Them mentality associated with group identity. We are good, They are evil. Not incidentally, I have argued that this very dualism is central to violence itself.

Other commentators, however, reject the imputation of violence on religion. Sooliman characterises religion as a "currency" employed by belligerents in order to attract support, sympathy, and legitimation. Religion, she states flatly, "does not constitute the motivation for violence" (2017, ix). According to Karen Armstrong, "[i]t is simply not true that 'religion' is always aggressive" (2014, 1106). She cites competition for scarce resources as a more likely trigger for conflict (ii). Indeed, the primary cause of global violence over the past five centuries has been the protection of existing assets and the struggle for additional resources (Käkönen 1986, 110). Hector Avalos argues that religion itself creates scarcity through internal hierarchies and unequal access to perceived resources such as scripture, sacred space, and salvation (2005, 110).

Teehan argues for a more nuanced and hence a more complex role for religion in eruptions of violence. For him, religious frameworks of meaning give coherence to the inchoate experiences of exclusion, deprivation, and humiliation suffered by marginalised populations. While powerful prompts to violence may lie in adverse social conditions, therefore, religious ideology can perform a crucial function in the cultivation and intensification of violent ideation (2015, 16).

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[19] The scholars cited here are not alone in imputing to religion an inherently violent orientation. Others include, for example, Regina M. Schwartz (1997) and Johan Galtung (1997/8).

Ultimately, people bent on violence are as liable to justify their actions with political conditions, racial bias, or even science as to cite religious motivations (Sosteric 2018, 236). Even when violence can be traced to religious differences, as in the notorious St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in late-sixteenth-century France, I concur with Niccoló Machiavelli's view that religious power is effectively indistinguishable from secular political power (Avalos 2005, 339). The point is not the ideology driving the exercise of power, but the exercise of power itself.

Secular Violence

While warfare is often blamed on religion, strong evidence demonstrates that the formation of nation-states—itself touted as a remedy for religious violence—was itself a source of hostilities.[20] The historical genealogy for this argument begins in the early agrarian era. While earlier hunter-gatherer societies did not generate surpluses that could support an elite class, agricultural surpluses were quickly co-opted by the strongest social actors. Warfare followed, for territorial conquest was the only way to accumulate more of the land and workers necessary to maintain the unequal distribution of power. The states that were founded on these conquests required military force to protect their plunder. Armstrong attributes to unnamed historians the observation that militarism is regarded as "a mark of civilization" (2014, 44). If this is so, then civilisation—on the face of it, the expression of humanity's highest aspirations—is in fact founded on humanity's most brutal impulses.

Cavanaugh's analysis of the contemporary relationship between religion and the secular state prompts him to call religious violence a "myth" (2009). The invention of religious violence as a concept spanning human history and cultures, in his view, is specifically intended to legitimise the construction of a fanatical "religious Other … to contrast with the rational, peace-making secular subject" (4). Here again we find religion conflated with dangerous irrationality, in contrast to an assumed secular

[20] Although not all violence is war, all war is violence. The two can be difficult to tease apart. Käkönen (1986, 114–5), for example, refers to rebellion against social inequality as "a new form of war". In this study, accordingly, the word "war" is sometimes—though never unthinkingly—used interchangeably with "violence".

sanity.

In rejecting the notion of religious violence altogether, Cavanaugh argues that (a) history has shown secular institutions to be as violent as is any religion; and (b) the distinction between religious and secular realms is itself specious (2009, 3–4). Armstrong agrees with the latter point, characterising the contemporary Western understanding of religion as "idiosyncratic and eccentric" (2014, 3–4). As has already been argued, religion's blurred definitional boundaries lend it all too easily to scapegoating.

Strong, Weak, and Pathological Religionists

The scholarship on religious violence has generated a wide array of academic opinions regarding its causes and potential remedies. R. Scott Appleby offers a breakdown of these viewpoints, cited here in guarded recognition of the fine line between simplification and reductionism. In the context of this dissertation, Appleby's taxonomy is helpful in sorting out a central difference of opinion in the field: namely, the arguments of what he calls "strong" and "weak" religionists. The former are those scholars who consider religion a proximate cause of violence, while the latter attribute violence to other social, political, and cultural conditions (2015, 33–57).

Appleby characterises a third group as "pathological" religionists—researchers who have concentrated on the psychological factors implicated in religious violence. In this context, he cites a robust history of religion itself being framed as an aberrant human impulse (not least, by the venerable Sigmund Freud ([1961, 53]). Appleby lists several theorists for whom religious motivations for violence reflect a habitual paranoid mindset, exacerbated by alienation through humiliation of the subject or others with whom they identify (2015, 45).[21] Ultimately, however, James W. Jones points out that no credible evidence has yet succeeded in establishing "diagnosable

[21] Scholars who have explored the psychological aspects of religious violence include psychoanalyst and historian Charles Strozier (2007); religion and psychology scholar James W. Jones (2008); and psychiatrist Jay Lifton (2003). For the purposes of this study, I include Appleby's "pathological religionists" in the "weak religionist" category, in that both schools argue for factors other than religion as proximate causes of violence.

psychopathology" in perpetrators of religiously motivated violence (2013, 385–6).

My point in raising these issues is to suggest that it may not serve us to attribute religious violence to any single cause. The arguments of Appleby's "strong" and "weak" religionists can surely not account for all of the layered interests, concerns, and motivations of the human beings who commit violence in the name of religion. Even Juergensmeyer, notwithstanding his location of violence at the heart of the religious impulse, concedes that a particular set of political, social, and ideological conditions must be present in order for that violence to erupt (2000, 10).

Other Triggers

Even within the religious arena, factors other than piety may constitute an individual's primary identification with the tradition. The political or material benefits of allegiance to an affluent institution, social status, or fascination with particular rituals have been known to trump devotional fidelity (Hodgson 1974:1, 360). In eighth-century Tibet, religious factionalism in fact arose out of political disputes, rather than the other way around. "Religion", notes scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Matthew Kapstein, "became a means for the representation of political difference" (2000, 52). This type of power play is still very much in style. "Hamas[22] uses religion for political purposes", according to one counter-terrorism operative. "They use religion to achieve political objectives" (Stern 2003, 62).

By the same token, the fervour associated with religious piety can as easily be applied to numerous other passions. Anthropologists Tim Dant and Belinda Wheaton (2007, 11) report that windsurfers often consider their experience on the water as spiritual in nature, and cite sociologist M. Stranger as conflating the thrill of the sport with "self-transcendence".[23] Sport historian Barbara Keys argues that the sounds associated with sporting events "conjure up the liturgical power of church services", while the sport-specific jargon expressed in live commentary carries the power of invocations (2013, 33).

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[22] Hamas is a fundamentalist Palestinian Sunni-Islamist military and social services organisation that operates as the de facto government of the Gaza Strip (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Hamas", accessed August 1, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas).

[23] M. Stranger, "The Aesthetics of Risk: A Study of Surfing", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 34 no.3 (1999): 265–76 .

Political allegiances may also inspire the devotion more commonly associated with religion. Cavanaugh has argued that such allegiances—in post-Enlightenment Europe, at any rate—have been transferred from the church to the state (2011). Thus it is that powerful emotions may precede the objects to which they become attached, the latter then representing essentially interchangeable landing places for passionate devotion.[24]

All of this brings into question what can legitimately be termed "religious devotion"—and hence also "religious violence". In both cases, the word "religious" qualifies both the motivation for and the nature of the phenomenon; significantly, when applied to that phenomenon, it tends to trump or even outright exclude other possible motivations and natures.

Religious devotion is not seen in the same light as is nationalistic, professional, or parental devotion (Carter 1998, 10). Religious violence typically finds itself in a different category from sexual, ethnic, or domestic violence. And yet throughout human history, both devotion and violence appear to be universal. This raises an important epistemological question: does religious fervour, erotic jealousy, ethnic territoriality, or national pride precede violent activity? Or, put another way, were these allegiances to disappear, would violence vanish with them?

The answers to these questions might, in part, distinguish the respective positions of Appleby's "strong" and "weak" religionists. Juergensmeyer, Hitchens, and Selengut might imagine that the elimination of religious attachments would substantially relieve our world of violence. Armstrong, Cavanaugh, and historian Walter Scheidel, on the other hand, propose other social, economic, historical, psychological, and political factors as at least equally culpable in generating violence.[25]

Against Reductionism

Analysing the radicalisation of aspiring terrorists, Rik Coolsaet notes that the process is far from linear or foreseeable. It is, in fact, "messy and full of twists". Coolsaet

[24] Devotion may, in some cases, follow the flow of resources. Armstrong (2014, 708) points out that the original meaning of the word "secularisation" referred to the transfer of material goods from the Church to non-ecclesiastical ownership.
[25] See Armstrong 2014, Cavanaugh 2009, and Scheidel 2017.

cautions that any accurate analysis of radicalisation must go beyond individuals' motivations to include the socio-cultural context in which the process takes place. He laments that the complex interplay between the individual, "a conducive or 'instigating' environment", and group dynamics following the 9/11 attacks in the United States was ignored in favour of declaring Salafist Islam the exclusive cause of terrorist activity (2016, 12–13). Law's " [distortion] into clarity" comes to mind here, as does my previously stated concern that religious violence may constitute a particularly tempting target for such distortion.

Other scholars have also pointed to the inadvisability of reductionist cause-seeking. Jean Comaroff, for example, notes that the line between economic and religious interests is becoming increasingly blurred, making it difficult to blame social movements cleanly on one or the other (2009a, 22).[26] As argued above, the separation of religion and politics is further a relatively late and arguably artificial development, bringing into question various assumptions informing the influence of one on the other.

Nor is religion itself generally understood as a monolithic or exclusive moral force. Legal scholar Stephen L. Carter characterises the openly religious appeals of the 1960s U.S. civil rights movement as transcending religion to invoke a deeper moral sense. Indeed, few contemporary accounts of that movement frame it as "religious", per se (1998, 28).

All of these examples support a view of religious interests as spanning a broad social expanse, within which it overlaps with most, if not all, of the other spheres governing everyday life. Religion, in other words, is just one among various powerful factors responsible for historic shifts in socio-cultural norms and perceptions (Heffner 1993). This argument demands a broader analysis of those violent episodes in which religion is implicated. Perhaps, rather than a cause of violence, religion is what Appleby has called "a dependent variable" (2015, 34)—merely one of myriad factors

[26] Rather than viewing contemporary religious movements as ominous factors in escalating global violence, Comaroff (2009a, 22) sees a positive role for them in the shifting conditions of Western economic arrangements. Significantly, she rejects the notion that the centrality of religious interests represents a departure from the status quo, arguing instead that their prominence in emerging social formations arises from the reconfiguration of the fundamental components of capitalism.

influencing the othering of and aggression toward perceived outsiders.

That said, the diversity of scholarship in this area itself points to the inadvisability of fixed notions regarding religion, violence, or religious violence. The cases in which religion is prominent among the justifications for violence appear no more or less numerous than those in which it represents a lesser motivation. Members of the groups perpetrating such violence almost certainly vary in their own individual sense of religious motivation; and that sense, too, may shift with changing socio-cultural conditions. Ultimately, as Appleby himself observes, neither "strong" nor "pathological" categories are crisp or mutually exclusive (2015, 42).

Of the many synergistic and interactive potential triggers for religious violence, then, I suggest that Appleby's taxonomy neglects a particularly important motivation: that of group identity. Like most aspects of human conduct, group identity is multi-dimensional. It maintains a complex relationship with both religion and violence, making it difficult to pin down as clearly causal or resultant with respect to either.

My argument proceeds to explore this relationship, beginning with an enquiry into the role of emotion in this richly layered configuration. Emotion, particularly anger, is closely bonded with the phenomena of identity formation and maintenance (Stets and Tsushima 2001). Such emotion is clearly implicated in violence; but emotional experience is also an important component of religious commitment, as this study will proceed to demonstrate.

The Role of Emotion

Appleby's three categories of scholarship on religious violence address primarily cultural and socio-political conditions. The complexity of human experience, however, requires a deeper exploration of the motivations for violent acts. Emotional stimuli and inducements are implicated in both religious fervour and the impulse to violence. This section posits emotion as a factor linking religion and violence, and therefore as a significant undercurrent in the dynamics driving religious violence.

Emotion and Religion

The linkage of emotion and religion in the popular mind can be traced at least as far back as the French Revolution. Following that momentous historical episode, "civic

emotion" became a pressing political issue. Leaders of the emerging, self-consciously post-religious order applied themselves to channelling the "public emotion-culture" into support of revolutionary ideals. To meet this imperative, philosopher Auguste Comte proposed a new "religion of humanity", characterised by intense feelings of love and altruism (Nussbaum 2011, 7–8). Although Comte failed to impress his civil religion on the popular imagination, his ideas have since continued to exert substantial influence on philosophers around the world (2013, 19).

The debate surrounding Comte's proposals was part of a larger movement of eighteenth-century European Romanticism. Many religious thinkers in that tradition embraced emotion and intuition as the essence of religiosity (Jensen 2014, 16). Indeed, Comte himself deliberately infused his "religion of humanity" with public rituals and symbols calculated to stir up powerful emotions (Nussbaum 2013, 8). It was in the spirit of this same European Romanticism that Schleiermacher characterised religion as "feeling stirred in the highest direction" (1893, 39n10).

This view is not without its supporters today. In an article entitled "Religion Is Not a Preference", political scientist Joshua Mitchell plumbs the Hebrew Bible and New Testament to describe the experience of Judeo-Christian devotion as characterised by "rapture", "awe", and "love". His point is that emotions—specifically those of humility and exaltation—more accurately depict religious engagement than do doctrinal conviction or ritual activity (2007, 352). Philosopher Stephen T. Asma asserts, in fact, that "[e]motional therapy is the animating heart of religion". For him, emotional regulation is in fact the primary function of religion (2018).

Whether religion calms or inflames the passions, there can be little argument that where religion is found, emotion is bound to be close by. Boyer argues that religion activates our most powerful emotions because it draws on mental processes connected to a combination of central cultural concepts, including social interactivity and morality. Among these processes is the capacity to "excite the human mind" (Boyer 2001, 329)—perhaps what Mitchell is thinking of when he describes the upwelling of "*ecstasis*"—exaltation—in religious engagement (Mitchell 2007, 353; emphasis original).

Emotion and Violence

Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz is among those who consider "violent emotion" or "passion" a central motivation for warfare (Bassford 2016). However, the primary emotion implicated in violence may not be anger, as one might assume, but disgust. While a particular act might generate temporary situational anger, disgust goes to the fundamental character of the Other (Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank, 2012). As such, it may represent a more durable and intractable motivation for violence than does anger.

But while anger or disgust might prompt a desire to vanquish or eliminate the Other, it appears that violence may also generate positive emotions, such as ecstatic experience. Journalist Chris Hedges likens the "god-like" power to kill others in the heady ferment of war to "the ecstasy of erotic love" (2002, 88). Mark C. Taylor, too, argues for the erotic underpinnings of violence (2007, 176–7). Indeed, philosopher Georges Bataille deliberately contemplated images of violent death in order to attain ecstatic states (Bush 2011, 302). In these cases, the object of violence would presumably be interchangeable. Any victim will suffice to trigger the desired ecstasy.

Ecstasy

The etymology of "ecstasy" derives from a sense of "standing outside" of conventional consciousness.[27] In this sense, ethicist William F. May argues that acts of terrorism, specifically, can be said to generate ecstasy: an experience of being "beside oneself" in the throes of frenzied outrage. Importantly, such ecstasy is not confined to terrorists—actors conventionally understood to be possessed of pathological fervour—but also finds expression in state actors. Whatever ideology or institution the violent perpetrator is pledged to uphold, a point is reached when the emotional force of violence overrides the constraints of reason and the fear of consequences (May 1974).

The experience of heightened exhilaration commonly conflated with ecstasy, then, may derive as much from a craving for excitement as from vanquishing an enemy.

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[27] See Eric Partridge, *Origins*, s.v. "stand".

The experience of violence presents an invigorating escape from the quotidian. “The brush with death relieves men of that other death—boredom”, May remarks, suggesting that even the dangerous encounter with mortality may sometimes be preferable to the humdrum routines of everyday life (1974, 290).

Sociologist Bernhard Giesen submits that violent acts generate “ecstatic self-intensification”, which he argues is a stronger motivation than any other discussed thus far. While incentives to violence such as greed, impunity, and social discontents can be addressed, no proposed remedies for these ills can penetrate the “utter egocentrism” to which Giesen attributes the urge to experience ultimate power through destructive agency. The amplification of self and ego Giesen describes here would seem to reflect the power of identity as a site of fixation. The relationship between identity and religious fervour is further emphasised in his characterisation of this egocentric ecstasy as “a deified self-intensification” (2015a, 86). In the intense experience described, identity, religion, and violence are seen to participate in a potent dialectic that affirms and magnifies all three.

May traces a religious foundation for ecstasy in violence to the Babylonian creation myth, in which Marduk, “the cosmic sheriff”, and Tiamat, representing cosmic chaos, engage in brutal combat. The struggle ends with Marduk’s “fevered excess” in savagely dismembering his foe (1974, 285–6). Based on this implied synergistic interaction of religion and violence, as expressed more than three thousand years ago, I am moved to speculate that this relationship is, if not exactly hardwired into the human condition, at least long established in custom. Indeed, historian Terry Eagleton proposes that “[t]error begins as a religious idea … and religion is all about deeply ambivalent powers which both enrapture and annihilate” (2005, 2).[28] From this point of view—as also argued by Appleby’s strong religionists—violence is imbricated in religion.

Certainly, early poets attributed violent activity to Eagleton’s divine “ambivalent

[28] I am aware of conflating terror with violence here. According to Hannah Arendt (1969), the two are distinct in that terror describes the form of government that arises in the wake of unopposed violence. In the context of our contemporary experience of religious violence, however, I argue that the vernacular overlap between the meanings of the two terms justifies such conflation.

powers", crediting the gods—or, for that matter, God—for natural disasters. These attributions may have led humans to associate extreme fear and calamity with the deities they worshiped and tried to appease (Kitts 2013, 411). Nor is the combination of divinely inspired disaster and ecstatic release confined to ancient times; the Bosnian Serb war criminal Radovan Karadzic, in claiming the godlike power to dispense "universal distress", promised his followers "an ecstasy of vengeance" (414). Again, the interweaving of divine agency and ecstatic violence appears to be encoded in human experience.

Religion, Violence, and Identity

> It seems that defining ourselves against the Other sets in motion a cycle of violence that no legislation can hold.
> —Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*

While both perpetrators and observers frequently attribute violent acts and campaigns to religious motivations, the scholarship cited above suggests that violence is prompted by a more complex mix of conditions. In this section, I will argue that most, if not all, of these conditions can themselves be traced to questions of identity.

I am not, of course, the first to make this argument. Terrorism scholar Jessica Stern proposes that religion comprises two imperatives: spirituality and identity, the latter "often in opposition to others" (2003, 137). Fundamentalism, in particular, has been defined as a strategy employed by religious actors reacting to perceived threats to their "distinctive identity as a people or group" (Appleby and Marty 1997, 3). This gloss supports my own argument, which ranks threats to identity as more compelling motivations for violence than are theological or ideological disputes.

Rik Coolsaet points out that second- and third-generation Muslims in Europe have increasingly identified with "the religious affiliation that society constantly throws in their face". In support of this argument, he cites the growth and popularity of groups such as Sharia4Belgium, a radical Islamist collective active in Antwerp, and other cells connected with ISIS (2016, 33).

But the phenomena associated with radicalisation are by no means exclusive to

Islamist groups. These are, rather, common to many cliques drawn together by actual or perceived common identities. Coolsaet's description of the process involved is worth quoting at length here.

> Radicalisation is first and foremost a socialisation process in which group dynamics (kinship and friendship) are more important than ideology. … Socialisation into extremism and, eventually, into terrorism, happens gradually and requires a more or less prolonged group process. Feelings of frustration and inequity first have to be interiorised and then lead to a mental separation from society (which is held responsible for those feelings). Individuals then reach out to others who share the same feelings, and create an "in-group". Within such a group, personal feelings get politicised ("what are we going to do about it?"). Groupthink gradually solidifies into an unquestioned belief system and attitude, with alternative pathways gradually being pushed aside. In this process, ideology helps to dehumanise the outside-group and transforms innocents (who bear no responsibility for the original feelings of frustration and inequity) into guilty accomplices. In this process of gathering extremism, for most of the individuals involved, it is not the narrative (i.e., the ideology) that eventually lures them into terrorism. (Coolsaet 2016, 12)

Several key themes of this dissertation are to be found in Coolsaet's extrapolation. First, according to his analysis, the process of radicalisation begins with "feelings of frustration and inequity"—that is, emotions. If Boyer is correct in his assessment of religion as a source of powerful emotions, it seems not unreasonable to infer that Coolsaet's recruits may well seek it out as anodyne, specifically, for the painful experience of the negative emotions cited. "Feelings stirred in the highest direction", as per Schleiermacher, would surely offer relief from those stirred in the very much lower direction of powerlessness in the face of injustice.

Second, Coolsaet argues that identification with the group exerts more power over the individual recruit than does the attraction of ideological content. Indeed, in a survey of 61 convicted Islamist terrorists in Canada and Europe, terrorism researchers Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller found that "a significant number" of their subjects had only a superficial grasp of the religion whose authority they claimed for their violent acts (2012, 9). According to Stern's aforementioned counter-terrorism expert, it is not uncommon to find pornographic movies in the homes of leading Hamas activists, some of whom are "not so religious" (2003, 61–2). These findings

support my argument that while religious ideology may well contribute to violent acts, the forces of group identification run deeper and stronger than doctrine.[29]

Third, the dualistic split between Us, Coolsaet's "in-group", and Them, the dehumanised "outside-group", necessarily precedes the move to violence. Significantly, this split requires prolonged identification with the perceived "in-group"—again, highlighting the importance of group identity in fomenting the conceptual framework that may eventually justify violence.

And fourth, Coolsaet's description touches on the tripartite rites of passage proposed by Arnold van Gennep. Briefly, van Gennep's three phases of such rites describe an initial separation from the mainstream social order; a "threshold" passage, characterised by an inversion of that order; and finally, a return to stability, albeit one in which the transformation of those who have passed across the threshold necessarily transforms the society as a whole (Turner 1974a, 196). The next chapter of this study will apply van Gennep's framework to Coolsaet's depiction of the radicalisation process—this in the interests of building my argument that violence represents, at least in part, an autonomic response to a societal need for transformation.

Group Identity

The tendency for human beings to coalesce into groups, and to identify with those groups, is deeply rooted in our evolutionary development. An important aspect of such identification is the emergence of a moral binary, in which morality is perceived as the property of in-group, or Us. Accordingly, the out-group—Them—is considered outside this established moral framework (Teehan 2015, 6).[30] From this perspective, the tendency of humans to form in- and out-groups is encoded in early evolutionary imperatives. The orientation to an exclusionary group identity, then, may be virtually primal in human psychology.

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[29] See also Aly and Striegher (2012, 855–6). These researchers report that recruits to violent extremist groups are typically drawn in by social factors, often amending their religious views in order to become more aligned with the group.

[30] Teehan (2015, 14) clarifies that this way of perceiving the Other or Them need not necessarily constitute a bias, as such. It does, however, imply a hierarchy of people innately deserving of "moral sensibility".

Contemporary psychological research accords with this view, detecting this same fundamental tendency in individual development. The infant develops a sense of "we-ness" by identifying with those perceived as most like itself. This trend ultimately crystallises in large-group identity, which is by nature exclusive of those not perceived as insiders (Volkan 2014, 18–20). Indeed, psychiatrist Vamik Volkan conflates this "we-ness" with what he calls "large-group narcissism" (109).

It would thus appear that the tendency of human beings to form strong group identifications is encoded in our earliest evolutionary and psychological development. Accordingly, in psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, the yearning for "belongingness" follows immediately on the most basic human imperatives for survival and safety (1970, 43). So powerful is the need to maintain group integrity that violence against the outsider may at times spring from internal disharmonies that are projected outward to avert threats to unity (Kluckhohn 1960, 177).

As an individual matures, identification with parental allegiances and values is challenged by exposure to a wider world of ideologies, activities, and events. All of these influences forge interrelated personal and large-group identities during adolescence. According to Volkan, these identities typically continue to inform the individual's lifelong allegiances (2014, 21). One's personal identity comes to align itself with the large group's ethnic and/or national self-image, and hence also with its political positioning. Such identification can give rise to the "'primitive' mental mechanisms" associated with prejudicial attitudes toward other groups (59–60).

Not surprisingly, then, emotions are deeply implicated in questions of group identity. Stern notes that utter clarity regarding one's own identity and the superiority of one's own group over all others, and the associated campaign to purify an unbelieving world, constitute "a kind of bliss" (Stern 2003, xxviii). This same "bliss", then, may serve to empower the dualism that I have argued is itself a central component of violence. It seems, too, that such bliss mirrors the styles of ecstasy described earlier, reinforcing emotional motivations for violence.

Religion and Identity

> [R]eligions are less about truth-claims and more about identity … less about abstraction and more about tradition or that which is passed on.
> —Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*

Religious allegiance has proven particularly powerful in consolidating group identity. In her study of groups claiming religious motivations for terrorist activity, Stern describes the cultivation of group identity by leaders who capitalise on experiences of alienation and moral confusion (2003, 30). These experiences, in her view, have multiplied as a consequence of globalisation, which has replaced relatively simple, localised identities with a profusion of potential identities (156). Identity is, of course, closely allied with self-esteem (Herman 1992, 261).[31] Given this linkage, it could be argued that the current extent of globalisation has made of group identity a more urgent imperative than ever before in human history.

Historian of religion Elaine Pagels points to religion's moral imperative as especially powerful in constructing an Us-versus-Them worldview. When a group views itself as "God's people", members of any group opposing it are logically "God's enemies". In the history of Western conflict, Pagels argues, this construct has strengthened the identity of Christian groups—and significantly, has further served to justify profound antipathy and even bloody massacres (1995, xix).

Nor is this phenomenon confined to Christian groups. Counter-terrorism researchers Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher, describing the process of Islamist radicalisation, characterise religion as "a vehicle for group bonding, a moral template for constructing ingroup/outgroup boundaries, a legitimizing ideology that is used to authorize the use of violence and the narrative basis for collective victim identity" (2012, 859). Religion, in other words, offers a particularly attractive locus of group identity, providing as it does not only a shared badge of belonging, but a gratifying source of moral righteousness and ideological support for exclusionary aggression.

[31] Esteem, from both self and other, also features prominently in Abraham Maslow's (1970, 45) hierarchy of needs.

Violence and Identity

I have proposed that a more fundamental condition underlies the expressions of both violence and religious allegiance: namely, that of identity. Yet these three human dynamics—violence, religion, and identity—can hardly be separated. Religion serves as a powerful marker of identity, perceived threats against which provoke violence. The dialectical relationship between these three factors informs the central thesis of this study.

Another scholar exploring this triumvirate is social scientist Malise Ruthven, who argues that the fundamentalist ideologies to which violence is frequently attributed are direct reactions to the perceived threats of modern secularisation to an established group identity (2004, 8). Ruthven further suggests that the rise of a twentieth-century evangelical Christian movement in the United States was closely related to the development of "a core WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) identity" in opposition to German, Catholic, Socialist, Jewish, and other perceived incursions into American culture (128–9).

Ruthven's research focuses on the relationship between religion and identity. Scholar of nationalism Anthony D. Smith extends his own observations of this relationship to include violence. Smith proposes that identity is as potently invoked by "sustained enmities and protracted warfare"—in a word, extended violence—as by religious fervour (1998, 79). He tracks the power of such identification to its expression in nationalism, which he calls "a 'political religion'" (98).[32] Cultural commentator David Brooks, writing nearly two decades later, argues that many contemporary Americans are now basing personal identity on political partisanship (2017). John Comaroff characterises such partisanship as "a species of 'fractal' citizenship" (2009b, 197). If Smith's analysis holds, it may be persuasively argued that the shift toward partisan nationalism tracked by Brooks and Comaroff is, if not inherently violent, then at least permissive of violent ideation.

[32] Social scientist K.N. Panikkar concurs, suggesting that contemporary India is seeing the construction of "a 'religious citizenship' in place of political citizenship" ("Nationalism and Its Detractors", *Social Scientist* 44, no. 9/10, [September/October 2016]: 7, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24890298).

The commentators cited above specifically link identity with nationalism. Yet as political psychologist Catarina Kinnvall has noted, religious and nationalist fervour can be difficult to tease apart. She argues that when a blend of religious and nationalist allegiances coalesces into a single, monolithic, "stabilizing anchor" of identity, it may be reinforced by myths and historical territorial claims in order to justify violence (2004, 757–8). The construction and reinterpretation of such historical narratives provide alternatives to the more insecure realities of volatile socio-political conditions (763).

Researching nationalistic and religious identity in Taiwan and Hong Kong, international relations scholars Edmund Frettingham and Yih-Jye Hwang argue that the shifting line between the two allegiances is subject to the prevailing political and cultural winds (2017). In other words, the compulsion to establish identity—at least, in this example—is more powerful than is the particular substance of that identity. Whether an individual cleaves to nationalism or religion, in this view, is a matter of expediency rather than of devotion.

A sense of threat to a particular identity, in particular, tends to increase allegiance to that identity. French-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf notes that while an individual typically identifies with any number of large groups, which aspect of his identity prevails at any given moment is strongly influenced by the perception of a threat to that particular aspect. The perceived threat provokes violent efforts to protect it (2000, 13). In similar vein, Armstrong argues that it is precisely threats to religious identity that drive belligerents to seek selective justifications for violence in traditional doctrines and practices (2000, 6).

Following these arguments, one begins to discern a certain thread. We are compelled to seek out group identities; perceived threats to our chosen group strengthen our identification with it; such identification requires ever clearer distinctions between Us and Them; we then proceed to seek out justifications for rejecting (or even eliminating) the perceived outsiders.

Threats to religious and nationalist identities are further complicated by psychological, social, and cultural issues. Criminologist Orla Lynch notes that "terrorism, radicalism and extremism have become entangled with notions of

identity, integration, segregation and multiculturalism".[33] All of these latter notions are specifically implicated in the phenomenon of group identity. Lynch argues that young Muslims in Britain have become vulnerable to radicalisation precisely due to mainstream interference with the processes central to the establishment of a healthy identity. This interference is characterised by an "othering" of such youths, along with demands for proofs of loyalty to "Britishness and British values". In this context, Lynch notes, identity has become synonymous with one's primary loyalty, whether to the nation-state or the transnational Islamist movement. This highly pressurised binary setup, she argues, pathologises the complex processes entailed in adolescent identity formation (2013, 241–4).[34]

Conclusion

I have argued that the notion of religious violence is a distortion of a vastly more nuanced and complex reality. Its failure to reflect that reality lies in the *sui generis* nature of religion. With its perceived non-rational glamour—its quasi-magical aura—religious fervour resists Western scholarship's Enlightenment-influenced insistence on empirical evidence. As such, it is often represented as opposing the presumption of secular sanity. To the extent that representations of this sort emerge in Western social scientific studies, a given religion may be rendered vulnerable to assumptions and projections not native to its internal logic.

The peculiarly vivid ambience of devotional fervour serves to dazzle the scholarly eye, too easily tainting religion with shades of irrationality. With violence itself representing the very enactment of irrationality, the leap to "religious violence" can seem logical. Yet, I submit, this logic is intellectually flabby—and to the extent that it attributes violence to religious allegiance, materially dangerous.

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[33] Although terrorism is inherently violent, radicalism and extremism are not necessarily so. In the context of our times, however, it can safely be argued that in combination, these three terms have come to be recognised as corollaries of violence. Indeed, Lynch (2013, 242) herself characterises radicalisation as "socialisation towards violence" and terrorism as "a product of radicalisation".

[34] Lynch's research is specific to Muslim youths residing in Britain. The assumptions she critiques, however—the insistence that young Muslims choose either ISIS or Britain—resonate throughout the academic literature on terrorism. See, for example, M. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); C. McCauley and S. Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no.3 (2008): 415–33; and R. Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

The flawed logic described here serves to obscure a deeper trigger for violence: the urgent human yearning to belong. I submit that religion constitutes an ideal scapegoat for violence in that it provides a particularly powerful locus for group identity. Those scholars who alight on religion as the cause of violence, from this perspective, are missing the wood for the trees. I argue, further, that those who attribute religious violence to other socio-political triggers may be overlooking the crucial element of group identification.

Neither religion nor violence can be reliably attributed to fundamental human instinct. On the other hand, the urge to establish "we-ness" has been authoritatively traced to the earliest stages of human development. The division of the world into Us and Them appears to be basic to our species. Thus, threats to Us constitute more than mere political or societal menaces: they go to our most fundamental existential instincts. I argue that so-called religious violence constitutes an instinctual reaction to such threats. The more serious the perceived disruption to or humiliation of one's own group, the deeper the division between Us and Them, and the more necessary the outsiders' otherness becomes to our internal bonding. The violent exclusion of the Other thus becomes essential to the survival of group identity. This dynamic, I propose, offers a more pertinent and workable explanation for the phenomena loosely designated as "religious violence".

Whatever the source of religious violence, however, its manifestation clearly opposes social stability. In this, it reflects the "rootlessness, instability, [and] rapid transition from one state to the next, one fetish to another" characteristic of contemporary society (Frosh 1991, 187). Some scholars argue that this generalised turmoil is the very nature of modernity (Thomassen 2014)—indeed, that modernity is so constituted as to provoke crises of identity (Frosh 1991, 191). The dynamics at play under these circumstances, while chaotic, are however not without their own particular logic. The next chapter introduces the concept of liminality as a framework for understanding the frequently turbulent interaction of religion, identity, and violence.

Chapter Three: Liminality

I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.
—Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*

To the Greek philosopher Heraclitus is attributed the insight that reality is in constant flux. At around the same time—the fourth century BCE—Gautama, known to us as the Buddha, was thinking along similar lines. Among the Buddha's fundamental teachings is the fact of impermanence. Nothing in our world is fixed: everything is perpetually in the process of arising, dwelling, and passing out of existence.

This worldview is not confined to the realm of philosophical or religious ideology. Anthropologist and ethnographer Charles-Arnold Kurr van Gennep notes that "[t]he universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity". Van Gennep further submits that this universal process impacts on every area of human experience ([1909] 1960, 1–3)—that it is, in fact "the central 'fact of life'" (Thomassen 2014, 59).

This chapter takes as its starting point the ubiquity and inevitability of van Gennep's stages and transitions—particularly the latter, which he and subsequent scholars have classified as recursive "liminal" or "threshold" passages in human experience. The definition of liminality as primarily experiential is key to the argument of this dissertation. I propose that if clues to the riddle of religious violence are to be found in religion itself, the experience of religious actors may offer richer investigative possibilities than do examinations of religious doctrine. My search for such clues specifically explores the liminal experiences encoded in the Sufi and Tibetan Buddhist systems.

Building on the trifold analysis of identity, religion, and violence explored in the previous chapter, this chapter investigates the role of liminality in religious violence. The relevance of applying the lens of liminality to religious violence lies in the

extended chaos that characterises much of the contemporary conflict in which religion is implicated. It concludes by arguing that the explosive emergence of violence, particularly violence fuelled by religious dogma and threats to identity, may be associated with reactive aversion to liminal imperatives.

Liminality: The Experience of Transition

> Human society is built around a centre of the stability of the unstable.
> —M. Barnard, "Flows of Worship in the Network Society"

Van Gennep's analysis of the processual stages of existential flux first came to academic attention through his 1909 book, *Les rites de passage* (*The Rites of Passage).* A "rite of passage"—a term he is credited with having brought into the popular vernacular[35]—is "a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" ([1909] 1960, 10). A formal rite of passage can mark a person's transition between social statuses—such as the graduation from childhood to adulthood, or from the unmarried state to the married; movement through time (as in lunar or seasonal ceremonies); or transit across territorial boundaries.

Van Gennep identifies three distinct phases of the rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. Having observed these phases in a wide range of social and cultural contexts, he determined that this tripartite process was universal to all human rituals. He also referred to the three phases as "*separation, margin*, and *reaggregation*" in order to emphasise "the structural aspects of passage" (Turner 1969, 166; emphases original).

In every rite of passage, the same sequence is present: first, separation of the neophyte from community life in anticipation of the rite; second, entry into a liminal space where the initiand "wavers between two worlds" (van Gennep [1909] 1960, 18); and finally, incorporation into a new status, such as adulthood, wedlock, priesthood, or motherhood. Van Gennep notes that separation, transition, and

[35] *New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Rite of passage", accessed April 16, 2018, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p /index.php?title=Rite_of_passageandoldid=989371.

incorporation might be accorded varying emphases, respectively, depending on the specific ritual ([1909] 1960, 11). In some instances, all three might occur within any single phase.

Van Gennep considers the power of liminality to be pivotal; indeed, he designates all three ritual phases in relation to it:

> I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *post-liminal rites.* (Van Gennep [1909] 1960, 21; emphases original)

According to Turner, van Gennep employs this particular framing in order to foreground the spatial and temporal shifts that unsettle conventional norms and values; in short, to underscore "the peripheral position of [social] structure" (1969, 166). The word "liminal" is etymologically related to the notion of a threshold: the boundary separating an inner from an outer space.[36] Indeed, van Gennep devotes significant attention to rites that incorporate actual material portals that separate inner and outer or sacred and profane spaces ([1909] 1960, 57–61). Anthropologist and social scientist Bjørn Thomassen echoes van Gennep's view in noting that liminality can apply in both spatial and temporal contexts, as also in a combination of the two (2009, 16–18).

Victor Turner

Van Gennep's work was taken up after his death by English anthropologist Victor W. Turner. Turner describes the first of van Gennep's three phases, that of separation, as a removal of the initiand from their previous stable condition: a marking out of that individual (or group) for the transition ahead. During the second, liminal, phase, the initiand is bereft of status, "betwixt and between" two stable states. In the third phase, the initiand emerges, transformed, to be ritually incorporated into the new stable condition. The community confirms her new status by identifying her with this emergent cultural position, and expects her to conduct herself according to its norms.

[36] The word is derived from the Latin *līmen*, "which means both the lintel and the step or threshold of a door affording entry to a house" (Eric Partridge, *Origins*, s.v. "liminal").

Thus, a person previously considered a child is now perceived as an adult, or one in a previous state of ritual impurity is now received as purified (1966, 47).

Turner's interest in van Gennep's work focuses primarily on the transitional or liminal phase of passage rituals. Echoing van Gennep's "wavering between two worlds", he describes the dynamic liminal stage as "ambiguous", "an interstructural situation" that occurs "betwixt and between" two distinct states (1966). During this passage, the initiand is outside the consensually understood social positions. Turner offers an example from his fieldwork with the Ndembu people of present-day Zambia, where the person undergoing a male puberty rite is neither boy nor man; he is a "structurally indefinable 'transitional-being'" and, as such, ritually impure (1966, 46–48). Again reflecting van Gennep's view, Turner refers to such "liminal *personae*" as "threshold people" (1969, 95; emphasis original).

Defining Liminality

The liminal is understood to refer to a zone lying in between two clearly defined areas; but its own nature or character is itself not clearly defined, for the liminal is an unsettled, imprecise, even amorphous region. Here, the parameters governing past experience no longer apply, while those governing future experience have not yet taken shape. Thus, the liminal passage is intrinsically unstructured.

Liminality's volatile nature prompts some scholars to caution against too fixed a definition. Political scientist Bahar Rumelili defines it as a fluid "realm of social possibility" that is responsive to the actions of those who enter and claim it. She cautions against "essentialising" the concept, i.e., ascribing to it concrete, structured definitions. To do so, Rumelili argues, contradicts its anti-structural nature, and reproduces the fixed frameworks of meaning that in fact give rise to liminality (2012, 499–502). International relations scholar Maria Mälksoo concurs, noting that liminality, by definition, opposes essentialisation (2012, 482). It may perhaps be the case that reflexive attempts to concretise liminality expose a culturally embedded distaste for ambiguity and lack of structure.[37]

[37] Again, Law's caution regarding attempts to "distort into clarity" would seem to apply.

Thomassen defines liminality as simply "the experience of finding oneself at a boundary or an in-between position, either spatially or temporally" (2015, 40). Significantly, this definition does not locate the liminal in any in-between space or time, but rather in the *experience* of that in-betweenness. Social theorist Arpad Szakolczai asserts that the sequence of any rite of passage in fact mirrors the structure of lived experience. He further demonstrates that, in representing the death of the previous experience and the transition to the next, each experiential sequence reflects van Gennep's tripartite configuration (2015, 16–7).

Victor Turner calls liminality "a temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural 'cosmos'" (1974b, 73). It is that which lies "betwixt and between" established structures. In separating those ordering structures, Mälksoo argues, liminality disrupts them, along with their associated hierarchical relations and traditional authority (2012, 481).[38]

Ethnologist Jean E. Jackson offers, as one definition of liminality, Mary Douglas's famous description of dirt as "matter out of place" (2005, 333).[39] This view is somewhat reflected in Katherine Cumings Mansfield's conflation of liminality with "outsiderness" (2014, 129). Turner, his "betwixt and between" definition notwithstanding, implicitly supports this notion of the liminal as "outside" (1969, 111; 1974a, 16). From this perspective, what is out of place is defined in relation to a supposed "inside"—where van Gennep's "separation" phase would presumably operate. However, it lacks any terminal, or incorporative, state. Accordingly, Thomassen disagrees, stressing that the liminal is not outside recognised structures, but specifically in between them (2014, 7–8).

Szakolczai argues that the tripartite nature of van Gennep's analysis offers a helpful challenge to binary understandings of order versus disorder and structure versus the lack of structure. In contrast to those polarised attributes, Szakolczai proposes that a "processual model" incorporating the liminal phase provides a more accurate

[38] Indeed, Turner (1969) conflates liminality with "anti-structure".
[39] Douglas 1966, 36.

analytical approach to social dynamics (2000, 210). This model is precisely what I propose to apply to the phenomenon of religious violence.

The same logic prompts Thomassen to reject the term "margin" as a synonym for the liminal—this although Turner employs the word to paraphrase van Gennep's understanding of the liminal phase of ritual (1969, 94). Thomassen's concern, here, is that the term "liminal" is too easily conflated with phenomena at the edge of the conventionally predictable and expected. Liminality, he stresses, is not a shorthand for social exclusion; rather, it should be applied solely to that which is interstitial or in between (2014, 7–8). "To think with liminality", Thomassen asserts, "very basically means to realize that human life is organized as a precarious balance between the limit and the limitless" (11). Here, the concept of liminality is itself delimited.

The liminal passage is not applicable to the outsider or marginalised entity, whose status is lopsidedly defined only by the boundary that lies between itself and the "inside". When an individual is pushed out of the circle, accordingly, she lands in a realm unbounded by any outer limit. Van Gennep's third, aggregative or incorporative, phase is expunged from the equation. This approach, ironically, reinstates the very binary—insider versus outsider—that the liminal explicitly disrupts.

Following Thomassen's logic, this study proceeds on the understanding of liminality as lying explicitly between two stable states, rather than merely outside or on the margin of any given state.

Liminality and the Academy

> Liminality is … a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world.
> —Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, "Liminality and the Search for Boundaries"

The following brief survey of academic understandings of liminality serves a threefold purpose. First, it demonstrates how broadly the concept has been applied across academic disciplines. Second, it surveys academic views on whether

liminality promotes or threatens the individual and social good. And third, it presents the concept of permanent liminality, a condition in which the upheaval of the liminal passage is extended indefinitely.

Extending the Scope

Since van Gennep's and Turner's insights entered the anthropological corpus, the trope of liminality has expanded into a great many other fields. As Mälksoo observes, the concept is easily and helpfully applied to a wide range of disciplines (2012, 481).

Hinting at a broader context for liminality studies, Turner proposes that "the basic building blocks of culture" are revealed in the liminal phase of ritual (1967, 110); even that culture is somehow encoded in liminality (Thomassen 2014, 82). It is believed that academic criticism influenced Turner to restrict the term "liminality" to its anthropological context; he coined the alternative "liminoid" for cautious applications beyond that discipline (Horvath 2013, 2).

For humanities scholars Bianca Teodorescu and Răzvan Alexandru Călin, "[l]iminality represents a main factor in the development of society" (2015, 98). Rumelili proposes that in the field of international relations, it offers an analytical framework for the study of emerging and shifting social structures (2012, 498). In the social sciences, Thomassen suggests, liminality may prove as fundamental for analysis as are the venerable pillars of "structure" and "practice" (2009, 5). Szakolczai goes so far as to predict that liminality "is about to become a master concept" (2017, 231).

Sociologist Agnes Horvath offers a pithy argument for the wide applicability of liminality as an analytical tool:

> The crucial significance of the term "liminal" … is that it has an extremely wide range of applicability in its precise and technical capturing of the imprecise and unsettled situation of transitoriness. Any situation where borderlines and boundaries that previously were stable and taken for granted are dissolved generates a "liminal" situation which needs some solution, as the elimination of such boundaries generates uncertainties in which a decent and meaningful normality becomes impossible, returning the world into chaos. (Horvath 2013, 10)

Not surprisingly, then, many academics have recognised liminality as a fact of life in arenas as diverse as education (Mansfield 2014), mind-body studies (Jackson 2005), and international relations (Mälksoo 2012). Liminality is invoked in analyses ranging from sports (Rowe 1998) to virtual reality (Madge and O'Connor 2005) and breastfeeding (Mahon-Daly and Andrews 2002). Exploring the implications of liminality for management science, Jennifer Howard-Grenville et al regard it as a "cultural apparatus" to be shaped in the service of innovation (2011, 523–8). Mythologist Ingvild Sælid Gilhus argues that gnostic mythology relies on liminality to effect the transformation to which initiands aspire (1984, 107–10).

Folklorist Juwen Zhang suggests that van Gennep based his model of the rites of passage on "the commonality of human activities" (2012, 122)—in other words, that his tripartite template reflects natural social dynamics. Indeed, a number of scholars consider the liminal phase of those rites "a fundamental feature of the human condition" (Mälksoo 2012, 482), surfacing in their respective arenas precisely because it is already present. When the world appears to have attained stability, argues sociologist Piotr Sztompka, observers are merely experiencing "cognitively frozen phases" in the dynamic flow of natural events (2004, 155). These arguments represent a widespread understanding of liminality as a natural property of human dynamics.

The Merits of Liminality

Scholars do not necessarily agree on whether liminality is helpful or harmful to individual or social well-being. This section offers an overview of the debate in this regard.

Both Howard-Grenville et al (2011) and Gilhus (1984) gloss liminality as positive, even necessary. Clare Madge and Henrietta O'Connor, analysing online interactions among expectant mothers, likewise cast a favourable eye on liminal processes. In their view, liminality has the capacity to support "creative possibilities" in cyberspace (2005, 93). Stephen Bigger, applying Turner's research to the field of education, sees liminality as "a creative group attitude of mind" that seeks solutions beyond the realm of conventional premises (2010, 11).

Such favourable reviews of the liminal phase appear to draw inspiration from Turner's own appreciation of the moral and creative value of liminality—what Thomassen terms Turner's "celebratory stance" with respect to the unravelling of familiar structures in the service of innovation (2014, 10). Indeed, Turner proposes that cultural movements toward free expression transcend the in-between nature of ritual liminality to manifest "the holistically developmental" (1974b, 76). This approach leads Turner to posit the natural emergence of "communitas", a nearly utopian (albeit temporary) vision of social harmony and action. In communitas, the individual is free to explore spontaneity beyond the bounds of socially imposed structure (1969, 96). Turner considers liminality dangerous only from the perspective of those invested in the perpetuation of structured institutions, which he dismisses as having "to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions" (109).

The origins of Turner's thinking in this regard may be traced to his fieldwork with the Ndembu. In that context, he notes that the ritual relaxation of social mores in the liminal phase of initiation rites serves to incorporate normally destructive tendencies into the beneficial structures underpinning social harmony. Anti-social behaviours are understood to simmer below the surface of "man's mammalian constitution"; their invocation, then, is seen as a necessary support to the structures they appear to threaten—in the manner of a safety valve, perhaps. For the Ndembu, the ritual container acts to restrain the damage typically associated with such behaviours (1969, 92–3).

Rumelili concurs with Turner's positive view of societal liminality, arguing that liminal transitions in international relations should not be regarded as problematic or aberrant, but rather as opportunities to analyse social structures and challenges to established institutions. Indeed, Rumelili notes, the very existence of liminars[40] may contest the social status quo by exposing contradictions in the existing order. As such, liminal actors are inherently transgressive (2012, 497–502; see also Szakolczai 2000, 187).

In contrast to Thomassen's previously mentioned view of human life as an unsteady

[40] A term for liminal actors employed by Victor Turner (1974, 232).

equilibrium between limit and limitlessness, Turner's vision of communitas appears to conflate freedom with the absence of limitation (1974b, 60–1). Thomassen concedes that liminality represents "a moment of freedom" between two stable states, and acknowledges its capacity for positive socio-cultural transformation (2014, 7), but cautions that the timing of Turner's seminal *The Ritual Process*—coinciding, as it did, with the often-exultant social uprisings of the late 1960s—might have contributed to the perception of liminality as a synonym for necessary and positive counter-cultural rebellion (83; see also Szakolczai 2017, 231).[41] Thomassen criticises Turner for downplaying liminality's fearful connotations in favour of an idealised vision of cultural stagnancy properly disturbed in the service of positive social evolution (2014, 83).

Horvath, too, cautions against the "elusive and easily deluding attractiveness" of liminality: in other words, the dissolution of boundaries may be mistaken for a self-indulgent semblance of freedom (2013, 10). She submits that particularly in the modern era, liminal passages are characterised by "uncertainty, anguish, even existential fear" in a perceived encounter with nothingness (2). Thomassen proposes that such unsettling emotions as anxiety, doubt, and fear are "quintessential liminal sentiments" (2014, 14); while Szakolczai suggests that entry into a liminal phase entails "deep anxiety and suffering" (2015, 34).

Certainly, such characterisations align with the liminal experiences of nineteenth-century frontiersmen and -women pushing the boundary between Anglo-Saxon "civilization" and the perceived wilderness of western North America, where they encountered "extreme dangers" in the form of grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, freezing winters, and conflict with indigenous populations (Mennell 2015, 121). The terror and bloodshed associated with the French Revolution of 1789–99, likewise, provides a stark example of liminality at its most existentially menacing.

Yet as the earlier definitions of liminality make clear, this "fleeting and slippery"

[41] Szakolczai (2017, 231) further suggests that "professional pressure" inclined Turner to limit the notion of liminality, in its literal sense, to the small, indigenous cultures van Gennep ([1909] 1960, 3) characterised as "semicivilized". Turner, in other words, may have deliberately declined to apply his research findings to contemporary social movements for fear of inviting academic opprobrium upon himself and his fellow anthropologists.

concept (Rumelili 2012, 496) resists the reification necessary to enable either positive or negative ascriptions. Its essentially paradoxical nature makes liminality a shape-shifter, helpful or harmful only as situationally located. Indeed, liminality may sometimes even be simultaneously creative and destructive. It could be argued that this indeterminacy deprives the liminal of useful meaning; however, I submit that its meaning lies precisely in its negation of binary oppositions. Liminality declines the imperative to pick sides, so to speak. In so doing, as will emerge in subsequent chapters, it affirms an inclusivity that is central to the argument of this dissertation.

The debate about liminality's value in any given context helps to situate the concept in the larger frame of academic investigation. For the purposes of the present study, however, liminality is instead employed as a theoretical lens: an analytical framework derived from observations of human behaviour and social dynamics. In this context I submit that liminality is valuable, not necessarily in terms of its impact on social dynamics, but in its contribution to the scholarship on religious violence.

Permanent Liminality

The foregoing rejection of value judgements with respect to liminality notwithstanding, certain manifestations of the phenomenon have been widely designated as particularly destructive. In conditions of upheaval or rapid change, the chaotic forces liberated in liminality may continue unchecked. When a liminal phase fails to resolve in aggregation/incorporation, the ensuing situation has been characterised as "permanent liminality": a state of affairs in which the disruptive, chaotic aspects of liminality become normalised (Szakolczai 2014, 34).

Since liminality is characterised precisely by its temporary nature, the assertion of permanent liminality may initially seem oxymoronic. Yet examples abound of the ambivalence and uncertainty of the liminal phase continuing without resolution. Turner cites religious monastic and mendicant lifestyles as exemplifying such extended precariousness (1969, 107). Szakolczai points to the theatrical role-playing typical of premodern court culture, likening those engaged in such "games" to stage actors who remain onstage and never change out of their costumes; or to participants in tribal rituals who retain their masks and role reversals long after the ritual's function has been served (2000, 213). It is precisely the elimination of liminality's

natural transitoriness that transforms it into a sort of monstrous simulacrum of itself.

Turner argues that increasing fragmentation in social class structures in industrialised society has led to an institutionalised, and hence permanent, form of liminality (1969, 107). Building on this argument, Thomassen characterises modernity itself as an instance of permanent liminality. He argues that the fracturing of community into increasingly specialised segments has rendered communal ritual obsolete, driving individuals to seek meaning in consumption and the search for extraordinary experience (2014, 186). Political theorist Roger Griffin's emphasis on the specifically collective or social significance of ritual activity—its capacity to "refuel society with transcendence" (2007, 104)—helps underline the importance of Thomassen's insight.

The modern tendency toward individual fulfilment and thrill-seeking, in Thomassen's view, springs from a sense that humans are obliged to impose their own, contrived order on a fundamentally chaotic reality (2014, 229). According to this view, artificial regulation supplants rituals designed to channel the natural forces of change. Thomassen identifies such imposition as a central feature of Western modernity, which he considers "an institutionalization of liminality" (2015, 55).

This gloss is supported by Griffin's view of "modernization as a process of disaggregation [and] fragmentation" (2008, 10). Social theorist David Harvey, in similar vein, invokes Marx's view of capitalist modernisation as a shifting social dynamic characterised by crisis (1989, 111). Mälksoo cites the recursive nature of the Cold War and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan to argue that permanent liminality has become a universal norm (2012, 491–2).

Where liminal conditions persist, the new order that should properly replace the preliminal structure becomes ever more unimaginable. Furthermore, even if such an order were to manifest from an extended liminality, its success is by no means guaranteed (Szakolczai 2000, 210; see also Thomassen 2014, 7). In losing their intermediary status, such phenomena fail to contribute their transformative potential to ongoing structural revision. Hence, Thomassen warns of the "pure danger" implicit in liminal phenomena that do not proceed to an overt accomplishment of van Gennep's third, post-liminal, phase (2014, 83).

Szakolczai cautions against the "entrapment" implicit in such situations, which he describes flatly as "fundamentally negative", even "intolerable". These conditions normalise ongoing disruption, generating an endless series of crises that exhaust everyone involved and that make a return to stability increasingly unlikely (2017, 233–44). Permanent liminality is "a genuine Infernal Machine", which negates the enduring value of liminality itself precisely in the loss of its temporary nature (2000, 216). Ironically, attempts to implement correctives merely intensify the turmoil by introducing further innovations to a situation already reeling from the effects of incessant change (2017, 244).

Turner, even in his celebration of communitas, recognises that liminality should not be permanent. As a "regenerative abyss", communitas provides the richness and power necessary for the periodic rejuvenation of stagnant structures; in the absence of the courage to transform, however, it will soon be rendered routine and sterile (1969, 139). Szakolczai likens liminality to new wine poured into "old bottles"—presumably, the stable pre- and post-liminal states. If the requisite "bottles" aren't available, however, the wine's "fermenting power" is lost. Permanent liminality in fact opposes transformation, for as Szakolczai drily notes, continuous change is itself a form of stagnancy (2000, 217). In both these glosses, the transformational aspect of liminality is considered essential to its functionality as a social and personal good.

The dangers of permanent liminality have been contemplated by scholars in myriad fields. Anthropologist Line Richter uses the terms "limbo", "waithood", and "on the edge of existence" to characterise the extended liminality endured by Malian migrants stranded in the Maghreb while trying to reach Europe. Living with scant shelter, eating garbage, frequently sick, and continually harassed by police and soldiers, these migrants settle into an everyday experience dedicated to visions of a profoundly uncertain future (2016). Cultural scholar Paul D'Souza describes the demoralising and often dangerous conditions faced by Kashmiri women whose husbands have been "disappeared". Many of these "half-widows" have spent decades pondering whether to search for their spouses, to declare them dead, or to remarry—and most of all, how to define themselves socially (2016, 33–4). In both of these instances, people lose their previous identities but lack access to the resources

necessary to construct new ones. They remain in transit, with no destination in view.

Business psychologists Charles Noble and Beth Walker caution that grave emotional outcomes may follow when individuals are subjected to prolonged liminal passages in the workplace (1997, 32). Management expert Nic Beech explains that temporary workers, perennially subject to being replaced and deprived of the satisfaction of formal hiring and termination procedures, frequently experience themselves as peripheral to their respective industries. Beech argues that such extended liminality contributes to social instability, confusion, and a sense of meaninglessness in organisational contexts (2011, 288).

And yet not all scholars consider extended liminality necessarily detrimental. While noting its potentially destructive disruptions to personal identity, educationalist Katherine Cumings Mansfield nonetheless commends a "*purposeful, perpetual liminality*"[42]—specifically, in the case of female educators challenging entrenched racial and gender leadership in their field (2014, 143; emphasis original). Gloria Ladson-Billings applies a similar logic to problems of racism in education, inviting progressive educators to "operate from a position of *alerity* [*sic*][43] or *liminality*". This suggestion of perpetual liminality invokes a positionality, rather than a strategic passage; indeed, Ladson-Billings cautions that her readers may, in their opposition to a racist status quo, become "permanent outsiders" (1998, 22; emphases original).

In both these examples, liminality is conflated with marginality and outsiderhood. Yet, as established earlier, the liminal is defined by its in-betweenness. It is liminal precisely because the instability that is its essential attribute is resolved in a new, stable state. In their invocation of a preferred, presumably stable new order, Mansfield and Ladson-Billings are describing something other than liminality, "perpetual" or otherwise.

Behavioural scientists Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Cohen take

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[42] I have availed myself of Mansfield's term, "perpetual liminality", to distinguish such positive glosses from the dark spectre of "permanent liminality" invoked by Thomassen and Szakolczai.

[43] I assume the author means "alterity".

a similar tack in addressing the marginal status of Black women writers. The provocation inherent in these writers' very race and sex to a literary establishment historically dominated by white men, these authors argue, represents a "double liminality" (1987). By this, I understand them to conflate liminality with jeopardy, as in the term "double jeopardy" as applied to Black women.[44] This usage foregrounds a single dimension of the liminal passage—its danger—at the expense of its more layered complexity. These scholars, in my view, overlook the interstitial nature of liminality, robbing their analysis of its crucially transformational aspect.

In this study, therefore, I have chosen to follow Turner's more narrow definition of liminality as a spatial and/or temporal passage specifically bounded on both sides by relatively stable states (1966). A given individual undergoing a liminal experience may not recognise its interstitial nature—except, perhaps, in retrospect. At the time of its occurrence, the liminal passage may feel, instead, like an immutable boundary or a zone of unbounded exclusion. Yet liminality preserves its character precisely by coming, eventually, upon another boundary at its farther side. Thus, although liminality may be perceived as outside or marginal from the perspective of either or both boundaries, I understand it to lie between the two. It is precisely the interstitial nature of the liminal that frames the argument of this study.

Liminality and Religious Violence

> [W]here categories do not apply, feelings of insecurity and danger ensue.
> —Iver B. Neumann, "Introduction to the Forum on Liminality"

In conditions of permanent liminality, as noted, the inherently volatile, chaotic nature of the liminal phase invokes ongoing uncertainty and insecurity. To religious groups whose identity is tied to notions of a cosmic war between good and evil, such conditions may well be experienced as directly threatening to their cause. The foregoing analysis suggests that the reactive attempts of such groups to restore stability may actually contribute to a deepening of the disorder they seek to defeat. I

[44] This term is credited to a pamphlet by political activist Frances M. Beal, "Black Women's Manifesto; Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (New York: Third World Women's Alliance, 1969).

argue that the ensuing frustration, coupled with redoubled efforts to impose order, paradoxically feeds a cycle of increasing terror and violence.

Impurity and Pollution

Significantly, the liminal phase of the Ndembe rituals that Turner studied is associated with impurity and pollution. He points out that in traditional ritual, impurity is identified with ambiguity: the initiand is considered impure precisely due to his lack of a clear status. He is neither boy nor man, but a "transitional being" whose role in the social order is undetermined. "The unclear is the unclean", Turner concludes (1966, 48).

Turner's ascription of impurity to the transitional phase is echoed in Mary Douglas's summary of the process matter undergoes to become dirt. The material is first separated from other matter; then, in decaying, it relinquishes its original identity; until finally it becomes identifiable as dirt. To rummage in a pile of refuse, Douglas suggests, is repugnant precisely because it restores identity to matter that has passed beyond the bounds of identity ([1966] 1984, 161–2). Just as decaying matter loses its former identity, Turner's Ndembe neophyte ritually "dies" to his pre-ritual self (1966, 47–8). In both cases, the liminal person or substance is considered impure, and contact is avoided during this passage.

As Turner points out, discomfort with ambiguous identity is also at play in Douglas's explanation of the dietary restrictions proclaimed in the Hebrew book of Leviticus (1966, 48). The prohibited creatures are those whose features or behaviour appear at odds with their respective anatomies or environments: moles and crocodiles, for example, appear to walk on their hands, while eels and worms swim without benefit of scales or fins. These animals, in other words, are "betwixt and between" the conventional and the impossible. In an imagined, strictly ordered world, they are neither fish nor fowl. Douglas argues that the contrast between this ambiguity and the "oneness, purity and completeness of God" underlies biblical prohibitions on consuming the "unclean" flesh of such animals ([1966] 1984, 57–8). Thus, taint and danger arise, not from any essential property of the prohibited substance, but from ambiguity itself.

Impurity is deplored in the more dualistic strains of orthodox religious traditions.[45] Jan Assmann notes that traditional pre-Abrahamic religion "rests on the distinction between the pure and the impure", and that early Christianity went on to apply this distinction in its own construction of the Us-and-Them binary (2010, 60). Emile Durkheim proposes that the division of phenomena into the categories of sacred and profane is, indeed, "the distinctive trait of religious thought"—and, significantly, that the two categories are mutually exclusive ([1912] 1995, 34–8). Those religious actors who adopt this line of thinking typically strive to align themselves with the sacred—i.e., that which reflects the goodness and purity of the deity. Its opposite, the profane, is by definition impure and polluting. French anthropologist Louis Dumont argues that the Hindu caste system is "essentially religious", precisely due to its dependence on hierarchical distinctions between the pure and the impure ([1970] 1980, 270).[46]

Purity, in these contexts, is frequently conflated with rigid adherence to a doctrinal stance,[47] historically mandated conduct,[48] or both. Armstrong points out that such fixation is typically a response to a perceived crisis in a cosmic war between good and evil, in which the perceiver is strongly identified with the forces of good. Religious actors who cling to rigid interpretations of their respective traditions, she notes, "try to fortify their beleaguered identity by means of a selective retrieval of certain doctrines and practices of the past" (2000, 6). In so doing, such actors may be said to seek a permanent "pre-liminality", unsullied by the perceived impurity of liminality. The threat of such impurity is projected on the purportedly unclean unbelievers who decline to support their efforts.

Embarking on the first Crusade, Pope Urban II declared Jerusalem "polluted by the

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[45] See, for example, Qur'ān 8:37; Numbers 19:22; and Mark 6:7. I use "orthodox" here to distinguish these religious positions from those of their mystical traditions.

[46] Not incidentally, the caste system may reasonably be viewed as an instance of cultural violence, per Galtung.

[47] A number of Christian churches, for example, prohibit women from preaching—presumably, due to St. Paul's insistence, per 1 Corinthians 14:35, that "it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (https://religionnews.com/2015/07/09/most-women-belong-to-a-religious-community-that-prohibits-them-from-being-leaders/, accessed September 30, 2017).

[48] One example is the Prophet Muhammed's purported prohibition on men wearing silk, which an Islamic website deems will still "certainly diminish the manly qualities and masculinity" (http:/www.islamweb.net/en/article/135515/the-prophets-guidance-on-treating-skin-rashes-and-scabies, accessed September 30, 2017).

filthiness of an unclean nation"—i.e., Muslim Turks (Kimball 2008, 174). Religious concerns regarding purity and impurity endure into the twentieth-century, when Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood inverted Urban's Us-and-Them designations, calling for the violent imposition of religious—i.e., Islamic—purity in Egypt (Selengut 2003, 77–8).

In these examples, violent means are invoked in order to maintain the perceived purity and stability of a religious tradition. This dynamic reflects the power of the pure/impure binary to emphasise divisions between Us and Them: the dualistic worldview that I have argued is a key component of violence. Although an Us-and-Them stance may not inevitably lead to violent acts, the added element of purity-versus-impurity reliably sets the stage for perceptions of impending peril and attempts to cleanse the field by eliminating those perceived as impure.

Such a crisis typically brings danger, chaos, uncertainty, and thus profound discomfort. These characteristics, as we have seen, are typical of the transformative, liminal phase. Since liminality arises naturally in the course of human affairs, as previously noted, the difficulties associated with crisis are unavoidable. My argument proceeds on the basis of this analysis to demonstrate that violent collision between conditions of permanent liminality and rigid religious identity is virtually inevitable.

Volatility and Resistance

From another perspective, the volatile ambivalence of liminality actually drives the communication indispensable to social interaction. Sociologist Bernhard Giesen argues that stable social orders rely on "the acceptance of the unclassifiable, of surprises and coincidences, ambiguity and fuzziness" (2015b, 62). In other words, liminal passages are not only inevitable; they are actually necessary to healthy societal dynamics. I speculate that this is due to the fact, established above, that liminality is natural to the human condition. From this perspective, to eliminate it—

were that possible—would be to impair the proper functioning of social processes.[49] The implications of this view with regard to the construction and maintenance of identity, and hence also the relationship of identity to religious violence, are explored later in this chapter.

However, according to sociologist Monica Greco and social psychologist Paul Stenner, the volatility Giesen describes generates "a hightened [*sic*] propensity for *becoming affected*" (2017, 25; emphasis original). In other words, individuals and groups engaged in a liminal passage tend to be especially reactive. Not only does liminality undermine fixed positionalities; those attempting to hold rigid stances are too emotionally triggered to successfully do so. Hence, Giesen submits, fixation on flawless morality and absolute truth is "not only merciless and dangerous but actually impossible" (2015b, 70).

Religion is a particularly congenial setting for ideals of morality and truth. Under conditions where it becomes impossible to maintain such ideals—such as the ineluctable dynamics of cultural change—those who continue to strive for them will inevitably be frustrated, inflaming the emotions ordinarily invoked by liminality (Szakolczai 2017, 233). This reaction, I argue, sets up a cycle of escalating disruption: precisely what Szakolczai has termed "permanent liminality".

If Giesen is correct in arguing that uncomfortable liminal phenomena are essential to social stability, adherence to a fixed ideology itself disrupts the very security it aims to maintain. The liminal passage that religious extremists hope to bypass asserts itself in the ensuing collapse of previously dependable certainties.

Two Hypotheses

I argue for the utility of a liminal analysis in the study of religious violence. In so doing, I propose two ways in which liminality may contribute to new understandings of the phenomenon. I call these "reactive projection" and "autonomic liminality".

[49] There are important differences between liminal passages mediated by traditional rites, as in the African instances studied by van Gennep and Turner, and the unmediated liminality of social or personal upheaval. Here I am following the trail blazed by scholars such as Horvath, Thomassen, Szakolczai, and Mälksoo in applying a liminal lens to the social realities current in the post-Enlightenment Western context.

Reactive projection refers to a rejection of the liminal distress that "We" experience by means of projecting it on "Them", the Other. Particularly if religious doctrine and tradition are invoked to provide reassurance regarding the eternal and unchanging nature of reality, pious compliance with theological and ritual orthodoxy may be perceived as bulwarks against change. When those bulwarks are shaken by the approach of an unavoidable liminal passage, reactive projection would explain the reflexive blaming of the Other for the threatened instability. The term, then, describes a reflexive reaction that seeks to deny natural liminal transformations by attacking the external persons and conditions perceived as responsible for the threat of change. When change declines to be curbed, the projection of blame intensifies and exclusivist positions harden, leading to violent defences of the antagonists' respective views.

The fearful projection of unapproved impulses, feelings, and doubts on to a vilified Other is a well-known and thoroughly documented strategy (Katz 2015, 100–1; Robins 1996, 80; Jung 1970, 3,463). My invocation of this phenomenon in the case of reactive projection, however, specifically refers to its emergence in response to the approach of a liminal passage. I submit that subtler shadings of the projective process may come into view when the role of liminality is factored into analyses of religious conflict.

The second hypothetical dynamic I propose, autonomic liminality, describes an event in which the pressures generated by resistance to liminality in fact bring about the inevitable liminal passage in the form of religious violence. In this scenario, fixated religionists shrink from the approach of an unavoidable liminal passage and attempt to defuse or control it. Such attempts, however, short-circuit a fundamental human need to confront chasms of meaning and cultural challenges (Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra 2015, 2). The price for evading the liminal is therefore further confusion and misapprehension regarding the nature of events. Autonomic liminality refers to the eventual, unavoidable emergence of the liminal in the form of violence, itself—a form necessarily distorted by the very repression that sought to deny it. The violence that erupts under these conditions may be even less controllable than might have been the case in a naturally advancing process. Further, the transformational

potentials typically implicated in the liminal passage will almost certainly be truncated, if not entirely destroyed. The very imperative of social transformation proclaimed by religious extremists, and actively sought through the medium of violence, is from this perspective subverted by fear of liminal distress.

In summary, then: those groups and individuals who find themselves tumbling willy-nilly into uncontrollable liminality might reasonably be expected to attempt to assert control over their fraying reality. One obvious strategy to this end is to reinforce the Us-versus-Them narrative that affirms their identity. I term this strategy "reactive projection". I argue, further, that the resistance to liminality—whether by reactive projection or some other strategy—merely delays its emergence; and that repression distorts its eventual violent eruption. This dynamic, which I call autonomic liminality, describes a situation in which those who resist liminality may find themselves unwitting agents of the very event they have denied. In this view, the violence perpetrated by religious extremists is perhaps itself a helpless expression of the liminality it seeks to oppose.

A further application of the liminal lens to religious violence invites speculation with respect to permanent liminality. If, as I argue, violence may be parsed as a liminal eruption, then the cycle of liminal distress, followed by rejection and projection, followed by an inevitable yet distorted disruption, seems doomed to ongoing repetition. Opposition to naturally arising liminality, in other words, easily becomes entrenched. The ongoing failure of violent reactivity to eliminate impurity, combined with its value in reaffirming group identity, tends to intensify violent rejection of liminal events. The ensuing state of permanent liminality, as we have seen, introduces Szakolczai's "genuine Infernal Machine" and resists the transformation necessary to bring an end to violence.

Liminality and Identity

> [W]e do not have a real concept of the self until we arrive at subjective, self-conscious experience as the principal medium of self-articulation. This is … a peculiarly modern occurrence in the West.
> —David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han*

Shifts in identity are central to liminality. In the liminal phases of tribal ritual

observed by van Gennep and Turner, the neophyte's former identity is explicitly and deliberately deconstructed in preparation for the emergence of her new social role. If, as argued above, the tripartite structure of ritual transformation reflects natural social dynamics, and liminality is indeed "a fundamental feature of the human condition", as Mälksoo asserts, identity is implicated wherever liminality is at play. Furthermore, as numerous scholars have argued, religious violence may be triggered by perceived threats to identity.[50] Accordingly, this section will view the connections between liminality and religious violence through the lens of identity.

The index of van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, tellingly, includes no entry for "liminal". Instead, an entry for "Liminal rites" redirects the reader to "Transition, rites of"—suggesting that for van Gennep, liminality is synonymous with transition ([1909] 1960, 196). Thomassen concurs: "If it is not about transition," he declares, "it is not about liminality" (2014, 15). The transformational power of the liminal event, as implied in the term "transition", is central to the argument of this dissertation.

In formal ritual, the initiand passes through the transitional/liminal portal to arrive at a new identity. Such transitions may be represented literally, as in a Chinese Taoist ceremony in which family members pass through an actual portal to mark the phases in a child's maturation (van Gennep [1909] 1960, 60). Turner's study of Ndembu adolescents documents the "death" of the neophyte to his previous life (1966, 48); accordingly, death-related imagery is prominent in Ndembu ritual (1969, 100). Such a death is necessary in order for the individual to undergo a spiritual rebirth (Teodorescu and Călin 2015, 99). The emergence of a new identity, then, is conditional on the experience of a liminal passage following the surrender of the previous identity.

Yet neither identity, before or after the liminal transition, is necessarily fixed or monolithic. It is true that the psychological literature has long supported the notion of identity as a stable, enduring aspect of personal selfhood (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 7). In this sense, identity might be construed to correspond with the notion of

[50] See, for example, Ruthven 2004, 4–5; Cavanaugh 2009, 33; and Juergensmeyer 2000, 224.

an eternal "soul"—a religious notion that may help explain the particular concern about religious identity reported by Ruthven (2004, 8), Juergensmeyer (2000, 161), and others.

Many scholars, however, consider identity a more malleable phenomenon. In socio-political contexts, identity is frequently assumed to arise from relational processes. Socio-anthropologist Richard Jenkins asserts, in fact, that "*[i]dentity is never unilateral*" (2008, 42; emphasis original). This understanding is especially prominent in analyses of group identity, specifically as emerging from social or political activity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 7–8; Snow 2001). In this sense, argues communications scholar Lawrence Grossberg, "[i]dentity is ultimately returned to history", particularly in the context of subaltern groups whose oppression is encoded in their collective identity (1996, 92; see also Volkan 2014, 91).

Social anthropologist Fredrik Barth argues that ethnic identities, at least, are inextricably bound to behaviours, which for him define the notion of "culture" altogether (1969, 9). Indeed, behaviour—or "agency" or "conduct"—becomes central in community transitions during liminal periods (Thomassen 2009, 20). Such behaviour expresses the inarticulable, unreplicable nature of human experience, which is the central factor in liminal processes. Experiences are by nature transformative; hence, to ascribe a fixed identity beyond the realm of experience is to deny the nature of the human condition, itself (Szakolczai 2000, 188).

According to these scholars, then, individual and group identities are forged in the contingencies of everyday life, and are expressed in activity. It follows that the performance of violent acts, in particular, is profoundly implicated in the construction of identity. From this perspective, to abandon violence would threaten the identity of the perpetrating group. I argue that such a threat functions to reinforce the view driving previously described attempts to replace liminality with certainty and stability.

Identity as Boundary

Boundaries and borders are, by definition, regions of uncertainty: that is, liminal areas. Indeed, national borders in medieval Europe often consisted of ambiguous, so-

called “debatable lands” ruled, if at all, by whoever seized the power to do so (Jack 2004, 289). Social scientists Gerhard Preyer and Mathias Bös argue that even today, national borders represent “dynamic processes of connection and separation” that function to simultaneously include, exclude, and connect (2002, xi). This threefold capacity mirrors exactly the nature of the liminal as that which joins two disparate states while concurrently excluding them from one another and including both in a larger reality.

Significantly for this study, Barth’s appreciation of the ambiguous nature of boundaries underpins his understanding of personal identity as malleable (Jenkins 2008, 153). Personal identity might thus be considered a “debatable land”, standing, as it does, at the boundary between past and future, self and other, here and there.

Not only are identities pliable; an individual can simultaneously claim more than a single identity (Snow 2001; Ferguson and Mansbach 1999, 79). In such cases, identity becomes increasingly difficult to pin down. Particularly in the context of nationalist discourses, liminars may straddle the self/other divide in ways that undermine the very parameters defining these polarities (Rumelili 2012, 503). Liminality, in other words, will not be confined to a neatly circumscribed region beyond structure, but functions to erode structure itself. Liminality dissolves the distinction between structure and agency; yet, paradoxically, the “hyper-reality of agency” in the liminal space gives rise to structuration (Thomassen 2009, 5).

Faced with the inseparability of structure and liminality, liminars may respond to transience and volatility by attempting to realign themselves with established social structures; they may deliberately subvert those structures; or they may employ both strategies. Thus, “liminality unleashes the contending processes of domestication and subversion” (Rumelli 2012, 503–4). As that which cannot, by definition, be fixed, liminality sparks the potential for reality itself to manifest in hitherto unimagined registers and dimensions (Thomassen 2014, 7).

In this sense, the liminal represents an ideal, shifting ground for the ambivalent phenomenon of identity—a ground that, in the complex dynamics of identity construction, is relationally implicated in its productions. As literary scholar Helen Vella Bonavita notes, what is alien and strange to a community represents internal

forces that are themselves shaping and being shaped by social realities (2011, xi). Liminality, according to this view, is more accurately understood as an aspect of identity construction, rather than as an environment in which that construction occurs.

Perhaps, then, identity is an exemplar of liminality itself: a region of experience in continual flux; transformation in action. Indeed, Szakolczai argues that the reality of liminal experience precludes the possibility of a fixed identity (2000, 188). This view is supported by sociologist Jack Katz, who submits that "[e]veryday life shapes individual identity through a constantly problematic lamination of self and person"—"self" referring to how one relates to others, and "person" to the ways one is perceived by others (2015, 123). In other words, personal identity is continually forged and revised through routine experiences of liminality. The fact that such experiences are routine, however, does not mean that they are necessarily continual. As mentioned, liminality that does not resolve into an incorporative or aggregative stability loses its transformational power and devolves into meaningless chaos. Katz's "constantly problematic lamination" must be understood not as a relentless disruption of personal identity but rather as a process of recursive challenges to stasis.

Those who oppose the malleability of identities are doomed to ongoing efforts to exclude liminal behaviours. Given only the choice between good and bad, right and wrong, the individuals and groups thus excluded will naturally find ways to assert their goodness and rightness in opposition to social opprobrium. Religious doctrine—in particular, sectarian interpretations of religious doctrine—provides a peculiarly effective source of support for such assertions. The mutual rejection of the more extremist Shi'a and Sunni Muslims of each other's claim to spiritual purity is but one example of the co-optation of "good" and "right" at the expense of the Other's "bad" and "wrong" (BBC 2014). Another example lies in the ways Protestants and Roman Catholics have historically projected barbarous superstition on each other, in contrast to their own, presumably legitimate, religious practices (Fitzgerald 2007, 109).

To the extent that fixed moral binaries continue to be imposed on naturally flexible persons and situations, a state of permanent liminality must ensue. Paradoxically,

then, identities subjected to continual demands to stabilise may be subject to an artificially extended form of liminality, which solidifies and denatures the otherwise fluid nature of selfhood.

Group Identity

Religious violence, while occasionally perpetrated by individuals such as Baruch Goldstein and Eric Rudolph, is more typically associated with groups.[51] As Juergensmeyer observes, "[t]errorism is seldom a lone act" (2000, 10). Indeed, Goldstein was active in Israel's ultra-orthodox Kach movement (Jpost.com Staff, 2016); in addition, his action enjoyed "the tacit approval of many of his fellow Jewish settlers" (Juergensmeyer 2000, 10). Rudolph, for his part, identified with the Christian Identity movement (Anti-Defamation League 2005). While these men purportedly conducted their respective murders on their own cognizance, both were identified with larger groups, whose aims they aspired to further through their violent acts. Certainly, the worst excesses of religious violence in recent times are associated with organisations such as the Tamil Tigers, Aum Shinrikyo, and ISIS. Thus, this section proceeds with an exploration of the connections between liminality, group identity, and religion.

It appears that like individual identity, group identity is far from fixed. Social theorist Alberto Melucci, for one, argues that the latter is interactive and relational, continually shifting in response to both internal pressures and the changing conditions of its larger environment (1995, 44). Sociologist Rogers Brubaker and historian Frederick Cooper cite "certain strands of the 'new social movement' literature" as attributing collective identity to "discursively mediated" social and political dynamics (2000, 16). According to this view, group identities are susceptible to the shifting influences at play in their respective societal environments.

[51] In 1994, Goldstein shot and killed thirty Muslim men and boys at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Israel (Juergensmeyer 2000, 50). Rudolph killed two people and injured more than a hundred others in a series of anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ bombings in the southern United States between 1996 and 1998 (Montaldo 2019).

The fluidity of group identity may, however, be opposed by cultural forces. One such example can be found in the rise of capitalism, which requires a consistent and predictable labour market. Michel Foucault observes that this requirement enforced a freeze on the formerly inconsistent and unpredictable contingencies of everyday life. The workers who were obliged to conform to newly formulaic schedules and work habits perforce adopted a fixed group identity that served the interests of capital, rather than reflecting their own existential trajectories. Szakolczai argues that the enforcement of such frozen identity is accomplished through the application of moral binaries such as true/false and good/bad.[52] Identities thus fixed become normative, leading to the perception of unfixed identities as marginal and transgressive (2000, 196).[53]

In the worldview of mutually incompatible binaries, there are only two places to go: right/good or wrong/bad. The location of formerly liminal identities at either polarity derives from a rejection of both the liminality of fluid identity and the possibility of a third option beyond the binaries. Such fixation ultimately bears little resemblance to the actual nature of a given individual's or group's identity; rather, as already argued, it serves to reassure its subject of predictability and control. Szakolczai proposes that the associated marginalisation of those identities designated as transgressive reflects a kind of scapegoating, as modern societies invent such identities and then transfer their discomfort with liminal conditions on to the marked individuals (2000, 195–6).

Melucci suggests that the liminal process implicated in the construction of group identity is often concealed beneath the appearance of a stable state. Such a relatively permanent and delimited self-definition, he argues, is a conception in which both the group and its observers conspire. Melucci attributes it, in part, to the semantic difficulty of understanding the term "identity" as referencing temporary or variable phenomena. Somewhat in agreement with Barth, Thomassen, and other scholars

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52 Szakolczai's invocation of Foucault refers to the latter's "Power and Norm: Notes", in *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, eds. M. Morris and P. Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 61.

53 As noted earlier, liminal actors are already characterised as transgressive, owing to their existential challenge to the existing social order.

cited above, Melucci argues that groups experience their collective identity as a multi-level "system of action", rather than as a condition. As a tool of analysis, he argues, identity should be understood as a conceptual lens rather than as an actual situation (1995, 46–54).[54] Sociologist David Snow accepts the processual component of collective identity, but argues that the product of that process—"a shared and interactive sense of 'we-ness' and 'collective agency'"—is equally central to defining the phenomenon. This product, in Snow's view, is nonetheless possessed of fluidity, impermanence, and contingency (2001). This being the case, it is difficult to understand how the process differs from the product; after all, an identity that is other than static, enduring, and essential must inevitably engage in a mutually influential dance with its environment.

Cristina Flesher Fominaya, examining collective identity in social movements, proposes that the "process" and "product" views of collective identity refer to two discrete and equally valid phenomena. For her, the process is the internal dynamic that shapes collective actors' self-understanding, while the product is a shared worldview that is apparent to both those actors and external observers (2010, 397).

Wherever process belongs in the attribution of identity, it appears from the foregoing to be instrumental in both individual and collective identity construction. While process cannot necessarily be conflated with liminality, the overlap between the two appears substantial enough to suggest a close relationship. Process is, by definition, unstable: it is a moving dynamic, detached from any presumed point of departure and not yet at rest in an outcome. This quality of movement is confirmed in the etymological roots of the word "process", which suggest the dual notions of departure and approach.[55]

Moreover, the nature of process is transformational. A chemical process, such as that combining vinegar and baking soda, transforms the substances involved into something other than the sum of its parts. In the case of this example, the results can be literally explosive. More to the point, however: the process cannot be reversed. The same is true of the liminal rites observed by van Gennep and Turner: adolescent

[54] Melucci (1995, 51) proposes that treating identity as an analytical tool rather than as a reified description can "introduce changes in our conceptualization of social movements, and … contribute to a different understanding of the changing significance of social movements in contemporary society". In this sense, identity-as-conceptual-lens might be seen as a liminal force in the evolution of sociological scholarship. Indeed, Melucci (62) recognises the necessary "uncertainty"—i.e., liminality—that this approach imposes on researchers.

[55] Eric Partridge, *Origins*, s.v. "cede".

initiands, having once passed through the threshold phase, can never return to childhood. I argue, therefore, that the processual nature of identity is in fact liminal in nature. I further invoke Melucci's insight regarding the simultaneous manifestation of liminality and apparent stability in the construction of group identity (1995, 46). While a group may experience itself, and be perceived, as steadfast and durable—as, for example, "African" or "Roman Catholic"—it undergoes constant internal shifts that inform its collective activities. What it actually means to be African or Catholic is subject to continual intrapersonal and sociopolitical dynamics that change the ways identity is perceived by both group members and external observers.

Melucci's conception of presumed stability as superimposed on naturally unstable dynamics highlights a powerful tendency of people in general to deny, ignore, or reject the fluid nature of identity. In the case of religious violence, I argue that such repression of natural change can lead to eruptions that express themselves in the form of violence.

Liminality and Group Identity

Sociologists Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen propose that binary "symbolic codes of distinction"—attributes such as inside/outside, left/right, and sacred/profane, by means of which communities distinguish between Us and Them—are in fact "trichotomic" in nature; that is, a boundary inheres in all such dichotomies. The dividing line between inside and outside, or sacred and profane, itself constitutes a third region. From this perspective, collective identity originates in liminality (1995, 75). In other words, the dividing line between Us and Them is precisely what makes these designations possible.

Spatially, the trichotomic boundary region lies "here", at the midpoint between where one has been and where one might go next. Temporally, it is "now", the moment dividing past from future. (This construction assumes a linear understanding of time and its operation. See the following two chapters for more nuanced approaches to the temporal aspects of existence.) Eisenstadt and Giesen further propose a "reflexive" dimension, whose extremes are located in God and the world, respectively, and whose centre point is the person who resides between the two. Significantly, the authors note that this reflexive register frequently reflects traditionally religious distinctions between sacred and profane, transcendental and mundane (1995, 75).

The conjunction of the subject and her spatial and temporal locations is in fact "*the phenomenal focus of identity*", for it represents the starting point for any exploration of both objective and subjective phenomena. It is the immediate identity from which all subsequent construction—including, presumably, group identity—must proceed (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995, 75; emphasis original).

Individual identity, according to this argument, resides precisely in the trichotomic boundary region separating insiders from outsiders; that is, the very rationale for group identification resides in individual identity. Yet the two identity locales are distinct, for the individual's perceived insider status is secure only from the standpoint of her own subjectivity. She is susceptible to the group's agenda and judgements. Excommunication from insiders, seduction by outsiders, social pressures, or a personal change of heart may alter her status at any time. Thus, while her identification with a collective may in some sense represent an extension of her personal identity, the object of her allegiance may shift.

Collective or group identity construction, further, uniquely employs the aforementioned "symbolic codes of distinction"—i.e., inside/outside, sacred/profane, etc. These codes are interleaved with demarcating binaries such as included/excluded. Due to their power to clarify distinctions between Us and Them, Eisenstadt and Giesen consider these "special combinations" fundamental to the analysis of collective identity construction (1995, 76; see also Snow 2001). The leap from individual to collective identity, then, requires the assumption of binary values—the dualistic worldview that I have argued is fundamental to violence.

It may be recalled that Szakolczai implicates binary attributions in the freezing of personal identities. These attributions, as indicated, are also instrumental in the construction of collective identity. Since the latter is less stable than are social or personal identities (Snow 2001),[56] it may be the case that, in the face of accusations placing them in the bad/wrong category, groups feel especially compelled to secure their existential ground. The Us-versus-Them conceit at the heart of group identity

[56] Sociologists Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1995, 172) caution against conflating collective and social identity. While the former is constructed on the ground of social interaction, the latter is a "social psychological concept" into which, presumably, one is born.

makes a compelling prompt to co-optation of the good and true coupled with projection of the bad and false on the Other. The fact that religions, in particular, are inclined to claim an ultimate understanding of goodness and truth makes religious collectives potentially more susceptible to such co-optation and projection.

It may also be the case that the religious impulse is implicated in evolutionary survival. As a marker of identity, from this perspective, religion—more so than other affiliations such as ethnic or nationalist allegiances—"primes the dynamics of in-group/out-group moral psychology" (Teehan 2015, 666). Under these conditions, the in-group's moral bias is employed to elevate its own concerns and to downplay those of the out-group. Religion, in other words, constitutes an especially compelling cognitive pivot for collective identity. This being the case, the manipulation of religious allegiance might be understood to activate primal impulses related to survival itself.

Significantly, the Us-versus-Them distinction functions to mitigate "the fluidity and chaos of the world" (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995, 74). Since liminality is characterised by fluidity and chaos, it could be argued that group identity—particularly in its mandate to include and exclude—is in fact initiated, at least in part, in reaction to naturally arising liminal dynamics.

Group membership is also pursued as a balm for social exclusion. The adoption of the group's ideology can compensate for experiences of low self-esteem and devaluation caused by society's own Us-and-Them protocols: specifically, the rejection of non-conforming individuals such as skinheads or members of ethnic or religious minorities (Günter 2015, 99). Lynch reports that the British literature on terrorism following the 2005 "7/7" London Underground bombings tended to paint Muslim and British identities as mutually exclusive—driving young Muslim men, in particular, to align themselves more with their Islamic than their British identity (2013, 244–50).

In these examples, the young men in question find themselves very much "betwixt and between". Rejected and/or misbranded by mainstream society, each individual is thrown back on his own personal identity—as noted, a liminal region characterised by uncertainty and chaos. Here, it is difficult to tell good from bad, for "in a liminal

situation, and only then, the borderline between hero and villain is temporarily blurred" (Szakolczai 2015, 24). This particular expression of uncertainty will necessarily present a particular threat to group identities founded on the distinction between good and evil.

Furthermore, the liminal offers no clear boundaries to contain a sense of self, for it is itself "the unlimited" (Szakolczai 2015, 20). Thus, to find oneself in the realm of liminality may predictably trigger an existential panic. According to Eisenstadt and Giesen's analysis, a collective identity that offers clear distinctions between inside and outside, right and wrong, can offer just the remedy for such distress.

Problems arise, however, in the discrepancies between insiders' and outsiders' understandings of goodness and rightness. These discrepancies, in Melucci's view, generate "an unresolved and unresolvable tension" between a group's self-definition and the way it is viewed by the larger society. A mutual denial of identities easily spirals into conflict—which serves to reaffirm each group's self-image, hardening attachment to their respective identities and the positions that differentiate them from each other (1995, 48). From this perspective, conflict is actually necessary to the maintenance of collective identity.

Not all conflict leads to violence. However, Melucci argues that when groups react to conflict by retreating into a rigid identity, the results often manifest violently (1995, 49). I propose, again, that such violence may constitute what I have termed "autonomic liminality": an unavoidable liminal phase shattering the bounds of its repression.

I argue, therefore, that identification with a group provides relief from social and personal liminal passages, in that it offers both of these a sense of clarity and reassurance regarding one's own righteousness relative to the characteristics of perceived outsiders. Religious groups have especially potent claims to moral superiority, setting them up as havens of certainty in an increasingly uncertain world. Identification with such groups generates conflict with perceived outsiders and is likely to be fiercely defended, leading in some cases to violence. I submit that focused attention to and analysis of these dynamics opens promising potentials for a richer understanding of religious violence.

Liminality and Religion

The introduction of religion into a collective identity uniquely shapes the nature of that identity—and its relationship to liminality. Eisenstadt and Giesen note that adherence to a religious worldview often serves to "overcome the problem of the fragility and fluidity of social boundaries by relating the collectivity to an unchanging and eternal realm of the sacred".[57] Tracing group identity to a supernatural source might further harden distinctions between Us and Them, particularly when outsiders are held to be both inferior and profoundly misguided, unaware as they are of their true, divinely ordained identity (2000, 82–3).

Thus, the imposition on our unpredictable and unstable experience of dualistic categories is arguably nowhere more handily accomplished than through religious institutions. Selengut has observed that these entities function to impart order and structure to social conditions. In his view, such normative organisation is central to worshipers' sense of ultimate meaning (2003, 8). The power of such identification is augmented by the fact that religions, for the most part, precede and outlast their adherents' lifetimes, adding a sense of continuity and permanence to the identification (Moshman 2011, 918).

For Jan Assmann, the dualism common to the Abrahamic religions precedes doctrine. That these religions are all monotheistic and consider themselves "world religions" is, for Assmann, secondary. More to the point is that the specifically exclusionary nature of the Mosaic religions automatically drives a wedge between Us, the true believers, and Them, the champions of false religion (2010, 2). While this analysis may justifiably be criticised as essentialising traditions that are in fact diverse and layered, Assmann is not alone in observing the exclusion implicated in monotheism. Schwartz notes that "the principle of Oneness" entailed in Israelites' allegiance to a single land, people, nation, and deity "threatens with the violence of exclusion" (1997, xi). Ruthven argues that "the Abrahamic tradition of Western monotheism", in particular, rests on truth-claims that necessarily exclude all others (2004, 47). These

[57] Eisenstadt and Giesen (2000, 82–3) apply this same dynamic to fixed views about "Reason, Progress, or Rationality", echoing arguments made in the previous chapter regarding the structural similarities between religious and other ideological positions.

perspectives notwithstanding, to accuse monotheistic religions wholesale of exclusivity seems reductionist. My reading of them foregrounds, instead, the point made earlier with respect to the exclusionary nature of group identity and the role of religious affiliation in such group identity. It may be the case that the scholars cited here, in peering through the lens of monotheism, are seeing the exclusivity common to religious allegiance in general.[58]

Significantly, Assmann characterises the designated "false religions" as essentially undefined. Devoid of orthodoxy, barely differentiated from other cultural arenas, these "cults" frequently failed to draw clear distinctions between divine and natural phenomena (2010, 11). From the perspective of the "true religion", with its explicit binaries, they must have seemed "inherently untidy"—much like life itself.

"Life", Douglas observes, "does not conform to our most simple categories" ([1966] 1984, 39). Moral regulation, in particular, is ambivalent and contextually conditioned (131). This view opposes the clear boundary between the sacred and the profane that Emile Durkheim attributes to all religious thinking. Yet Durkheim insists that these categories are not inherent in phenomena, but constructed—and specifically so in the context of group identity formation (Fields 1995, xlvi). Where the Abrahamic distinction upholds binaries such as true (sacred) versus false (profane) doctrine, liminality naturally muddles the boundaries between the two (Hetherington 1997, 33). Given that binary distinctions are precisely what distinguish Us from Them, liminality presents a clear threat to religious group identity.

Yet the sacred continually undergoes renovation to suit the needs of the designating community (Fields 1995, xliv). To the extent that group identity is tied to notions of the sacred, then, a certain fluidity must inhere in the collective's self-image. Giesen explains that this fluidity is expressed in periods of liminality. Referring to the "chosen glories and chosen traumas" constitutive of collective identity (Volkan 2014, 25), Giesen calls these a "liminal horizon" whose original, experiential inscrutability

[58] My suspicion in this regard brings to mind a similar conflation in Western overlays of Christianity on the concept of religion, mentioned earlier (Teehan 2016, 3). Such unwitting biases underscore my argument, elaborated in subsequent chapters, with respect to the importance of reflective interiority in scholarship.

must be made articulable through the constructions of memory (2004, 112–13). The inescapably changeable nature of the sacred, therefore, necessitates narratives that reframe the past in newly stable registers.

Liminality, according to this view, is inseparable from notions of the sacred, placing religious extremists in the impossible position of attempting to solidify that which is by nature fluid. Thus, I argue that the eruptions of violence associated with religious exceptionalism are, in part, generated by a fundamental incompatibility between the object of protection—the sacred—and the means of protection, i.e., fixation, in the form of triumphant and traumatic narratives.

Conclusion

> An anthropologically driven theory like liminality can overcome … analytical inconsistencies by emphasizing the power of lived-through experiences in shaping social situations and stamping historical dynamics.
> —Camil Francisc Roman, "Liminality and the Execution of Louis XVI"

Liminality is a natural condition that occurs repeatedly in the course of the dynamic change fundamental to reality as we know it. As Thomassen observes, liminality is inherent in human existence. It is implicated in our social and cultural realities, and in our strategies for dealing with change (2015, 40). And yet liminality has only relatively recently come to the attention of academic researchers, who are applying it to a broad range of disciplinary fields. From the realms of business and healthcare to those of sociological and political investigations, liminality is today being employed as an analytical tool. I argue that it may similarly prove helpful when applied to the study of religious violence.

While some scholars celebrate the ubiquity and inevitability of liminal dynamics in human affairs, others caution against the unstructured, even chaotic conditions characteristic of liminality. The normalisation of liminal phases, such that they lose their essentially temporary nature, has been dubbed "permanent liminality", and is considered cause for particular concern. Whether extolled or denounced, however, liminality is typically uncomfortable. Human beings, like animals (which, in this sense, we are), tend to prefer conditions we consider stable and predictable.

Yet its chaotic nature is precisely what makes liminality the fertile ground of necessary transformation. While definitionally transitional, liminal phases are also qualitatively transformational. The nature of transformation is such that it requires abandoning established certainties and enduring an often-choppy voyage across unknown seas before an unfamiliar but stable harbour comes into view. The liminal passage represents just such a voyage.

Any analysis of a given liminal situation must resist the temptation to define it in terms of the polarities it interposes, for liminality operates in a register that defies those very polarities. Thus, cultural historian Mark Meyers asserts the paradoxical nature of liminality as central to its value as an analytical tool (2008, 80).

Though it is true that any given polarity is what enables one to conceptualise any given liminal position in the first place, it bears noting that, by definition, the liminal is also what permits us to sidestep that polarity and to demonstrate its instability. In other words, polarity (or its other names: dualism, binary opposition) is at once the condition of possibility of a liminal position at the same time that it represents precisely that which is exceeded at that position. Thus, a description of liminality requires reference to something that exceeds the polarity in question. The terms of the polarity are not enough to represent the liminal position; liminality must ultimately refer to a third term, indeed to a kind of excess. It is inherently resistant to representation and thus frequently elicits paradoxical description: the liminal position is both “this” and “its other” at the same time as it is neither one (Meyers 2008, 80).

Identity, by definition, distinguishes self from others. To fixate on this distinction is to cultivate exclusion of the other. The more fiercely an individual or group clings to a fixed identity, therefore, the greater the necessity to distinguish between Us and Them. At the same time, binary extremes of good/bad and right/wrong are deeply implicated in identity construction—particularly, the development of group identity. Religious dogma, explicitly structured as it typically is to distinguish good from evil, provides an especially useful rationale for exclusion. In order for Us to be aligned with the Good, the Other must necessarily embody the requisite contrast in the shape of Evil. This is basic dualistic logic. The more rigid a religious stance, the more entrenched this binary worldview.

The tendency to cling to a fixed identity is a primary strategy employed by those who, knowingly or unwittingly, sense the approach of a liminal passage. Particularly when a purportedly stable identity is perceived as coming under threat, the prospect of liminality can present an unacceptable existential menace. However, since liminality is unavoidable in the course of human affairs, the binary cannot hold. The historical imperatives of change themselves become threatening, provoking active resistance. Central to such resistance is the imperative to eliminate the profane Other—a development arising out of what I have described as reactive projection. Accordingly, I argue that applying liminality as an analytical device may well help to shed light on the intransigence of extreme religious views.

I further propose that in the case of inflexible belief systems, the suppression of inevitable change and transformation can generate explosive tension that erupts in violent action. Attempts to deny the natural cycles of liminal change merely postpone their eventual emergence in forms distorted—indeed, intensified—by their very repression. I have termed this development "autonomic liminality", and further argue that it reliably progresses to a dangerous condition of permanent liminality.

Its existential uncertainties and the collapse of familiar referents make liminality a source of anxiety and distress. Denial of this distress quells its potential to inspire innovation (Szakolczai 2015, 34), further prompting intellectual and emotional fixation on idealistic, teleological thinking. Add to this dynamic the role of religious dogma, and the fruition of this process may well emerge in the state of permanent liminality we have come to call "religious violence".

As elucidated in the previous chapter, religious violence is too broadly and variously defined and understood to be dropped into a neat problem/solution framework. Accordingly, I do not intend my argument to be applied in toto to all manifestations of violence in which religion is implicated. I do, however, propose that the analytical application of liminality to the problem of religious violence may serve to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon, and thus perhaps to move us closer to effective mitigations.

The following chapters will examine the manifestation of liminality in two religious systems: Sufi Islam and Tibetan, or Vajrayana, Buddhism. By locating the

phenomenon of liminality squarely in these diverse spiritual imaginaries, I will demonstrate both its credibility in the context of religious orthodoxy and its utility in the specific study of religious violence.

Chapter Four: The *Barzakh*

> [A] coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both.
> —Victor W. Turner, *A Forest of Symbols*

Scholars arguing against the perpetration of violence in the name of religion have recourse to many well-known scriptural sources, such as Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek" and similar references in other religious texts and exegeses.[59] These purportedly demonstrate the fundamentally pacifist orientation of the works cited. Scriptural hermeneutics, however, are notoriously inconclusive. Appeals to believers' most aggressive instincts are as easy to find as are entreaties in support of peace.[60]

Nonetheless, this dissertation argues that religious traditions contain important clues to the understanding, and perhaps even the reduction, of violence. It further argues that the experiential aspects of religious observance may prove especially revealing in this regard, for liminal events are themselves experiential in nature. The correspondences obtaining in this regard may well encode information relevant to the research on religious violence. This may be particularly true of those expressions articulated in mystical traditions, since the latter tend to privilege experience over doctrine as the basis for mystical understanding (King 1988, 258).

Accordingly, this study proceeds with examinations of the liminal geocosmologies articulated in two mystically inclined spiritual traditions. The first, and the focus of this chapter, is the Islamic *barzakh*, specifically as realised in the theology of thirteenth-century Sufi master Shaykh Muhyiddīn Ibn al-'Arabī.

I have argued that dualism, along with aggression, is key to the practice of violence. In this chapter, I will explore Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical understanding of the *barzakh* as a challenge to dualistic thinking. In doing so, I submit that Shaykh al-Akbar's non-dual worldview, as expressed in his writings on the *barzakh*, may provide useful

[59] See Chapter Two of this study for specific references.
[60] See, for example, Psalms 144:1; Matthew 26:52–4; and Qur'ān 2:191.

insights into both the phenomenon of religious violence and the scholarship addressed to it.

Ibn al-ʻArabī

Ibn al-ʻArabī has been credited with articulating "the most eloquent expression of mystical experience and the mystical view of reality in Islam". A native of Murcia, Spain, he travelled throughout the East before settling in Damascus, where he died at the age of 75. Ibn al-ʻArabī, also known as Shaykh al-Akbar, was a prolific writer who is believed to have produced more than eight hundred works, only some 550 of which are available today (Fakhry 1997, 80). Of these, probably the best known is *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* (*Meccan Revelations*), cited extensively in this chapter.

Drawing on Neoplatonic thinking, Ibn al-ʻArabī understands creation as emanating from "fixed entities" in the mind of God. He differs from other Islamic Neoplatonists, however, in attributing the divine motivation for creation to love, rather than to "the necessity of nature" cited by such eminent Islamic philosophers as Ibn Uzlagh al-Fārābi (Fakhry 1997, 80).

Arguably Shaykh al-Akbar's most enduring contribution to Islamic philosophy altogether is his doctrine of "oneness of being", which he bases on the principle of *tawhīd*, or the indivisible unity of the Divine (Nguyen 2016, 332).[61] According to this view, only God possesses true existence; creation is a shadow or mirror image of the "fixed entities" subsisting in the divine imagination. Thus, the multiplicity of the phenomenal world is but a reflection of *tawhīd*.

This chapter will expound further on Ibn al-ʻArabī's philosophy and theology, particularly with respect to his view of the *barzakh*. It will explore the non-dualism implicit in this view, noting especially its relevance to the phenomenon of religious violence.

[61] Nguyen cautions that Ibn al-ʻArabī most probably did not use the term *waḥdat al-wujūd,* typically translated as "oneness of being". The philosophy it expresses, however, is clearly attributed to him.

The Barzakh

The term *barzakh* appears three times in the Qur'ān.[62] Sura 23:100 employs it to describe the boundary through which the Muslim passes at death, and which remains impregnable until the Day of Judgement: "[B]ehind them is a barrier till the day they are raised from the dead". [63] In both Suras 25:53 and 55:18–19, *barzakh* invokes an isthmus between two seas: "And it is He Who mixed the two seas, this one sweet and pure and that one salty and bitter; and He set up between them a barrier and a firm prohibition";[64] and "He has made between them an isthmus, and an utter-obstruction".[65] Other translations include "limit" (Bashier 2000, iv), "obstacle", "hindrance", and "separation" (Wardeh 2017, 272).

Islamic theologians most often describe the *barzakh* as the intermediate state between death and the Day of Judgement (Burckhardt 1979, 1), as invoked in Sura 23:100[66]—an interpretation somewhat analogous to the Christian notion of purgatory (Archer 2015, iii).[67] This understanding apparently arose from the belief in an afterlife current during the earliest manifestation of Islam. The notion of the *barzakh* as both a temporal and spatial location between this life and the hereafter, however, is a later development in Islamic thought (Smith and Haddad 2002, 8). A more nuanced interpretation of the term *barzakh* arose in subsequent centuries, most notably in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī.

Ibn al-'Arabī's *Barzakh*

Ibn al-'Arabī grounds his understanding of the *barzakh* in the conventional interpretation: that of an interval between death and resurrection. However, Shaykh

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[62] Qur'ān 23:100, 25:53, and 55:20.

[63] Sahi International,Yusuf Ali, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, and Muhammad Habib Shakir favour the translation of *barzakh* as "barrier" in all three suras.

[64] Fakhry, trans.

[65] Literally, "obstruction obstructed" (Qur'ān 25:53). The translator here is Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali, who also renders *barzakh* as "isthmus" and offers "obstruction" as a secondary translation in Qur'ān 23:100. I have consulted a number of translations; the version offered in any given instance represents the one that most simply and directly speaks to the argument under examination.

[66] The full sura reads, "'That I might do righteousness in that which I left behind.'No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected" (Sahih International translation). Tommaso Tesei (2015, 32) explains that this verse refers to the irreversible nature of divine judgement once the sinner has died.

[67] Scholars of Islam are typically reluctant to use the term "purgatory", more often resorting to "limbo" (Zaki 2001, 207).

al-Akbar's view of the deceased's experience moves quickly into the realm of paradox. Just one example is evident in his gloss on the popular belief that in the *barzakh*, the sinner suffers a terrifying contraction of the grave walls, while the walls move apart to accommodate the pious believer's body. Ibn al-'Arabī asserts that should a sinner and a believer be buried in the same grave, the walls of that grave will simultaneously move toward and away from each other (Bashier 2000, 145–6).

Consistent with this paradoxical bent, Ibn al-'Arabī defines the *barzakh* as concurrently separative and unitive. Taking the example of the Qur'ān's two seas, salty and sweet, he proposes that the isthmus dividing them meets each on its own terms—on the salty side, the isthmus is salty, and on the sweet side, sweet. And yet the *barzakh* is unvarying in its own nature; it cannot have two "faces", for that would imply a *barzakh* within the *barzakh* (Bashier 2000, 159).[68]

The *barzakh*, in other words, is not identical with either of its adjacent entities, but "has in itself the power of each of them" (Morris 1995, 7).[69] This logic may perhaps be grasped in a close reading of Ibn al-'Arabī's statement that

> separation occurs between two likenesses. Separation has the property of the two likenesses, without doubt, because the separation stands counter to each likeness through its own essence. Were it not for the separation, the likeness would not have become distinct from its likeness. (Cited in Chittick 1998, 77)[70]

I understand this explanation to mean that the separative article—the *barzakh*—is identical to the two entities it separates in its unlikeness to either of them. This unlikeness, relative to the two entities, constitutes the *barzakh's* essence.

But the last of Shaykh al-Akbar's three sentences above suggests that it is in fact the *barzakh* that keeps the two entities from recognising their oneness—for at the ultimate level, all created phenomena are one in their derivation from an undifferentiated divine source (Chittick 1998, 168). At the same time, this very *barzakh* functions to dissolve the perception of duality that veils the truth of unity

[68] Bashier is citing Ibn al-'Arabī's *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 518.1.
[69] Morris is citing Ibn al-'Arabī's *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.
[70] *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 286.32.

(Bashier 2004, 86). As will become evident, Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh* enables the manifestation of relativity, itself.

The *barzakh*, explains Titus Burckhardt, is the point where the absolute and relative realms meet. It is that which separates the two oceans of "Quiddity and the Qualities", respectively—that is, the indivisible ipseity of God and the manifestation of God's attributes in created phenomena. But this separation, from an absolute standpoint, is a perspectival illusion. Viewed as an ontological phenomenon, the *barzakh* separates relative phenomena; at the absolute level, it is that which mediates between the two Qur'anic seas: the Sea of Meanings and the Sea of Sensory Things (1979, 1–2; Chittick 1989, 123).[71]

> The barzakh is … separation only in that it is itself the starting point of a separative perspective, in the eyes of which it appears to be a limit. And this finds an analogy in what is called the "blind spot" in the physical eye, at the very place where the optic nerve perforates it. (Burckhardt 1979, 2)

Thus, at the very point of its agency, the mechanism that makes vision possible necessarily negates vision itself. In the same way the *barzakh*, though imperceptible to the senses (Chittick 1989, 118), is indispensable to the operations of our everyday sensibility. This portrayal reflects a clear correspondence between the ubiquity and unavoidability of the *barzakh,* on the one hand, and on the other, the nature of liminality, as established in the previous chapter.

A helpful analogy for the *barzakh* is that of a prism, which transforms the pure light of the absolute into the many colours of the created realm (Burckhardt 1979, 1). The transformation of the absolute through this mediation is in fact what makes life as we know it possible. The essence of God's pure light is neither compromised nor corrupted in its journey through the prism; on the contrary, this passage is precisely what transforms that light into the forms of the phenomenal world. All of the divine attributes exist in God's creations, albeit in relative form (Chittick 1989, 16). In this sense, the coloured lights emerging from the prism are essentially identical in nature to the divine light that gives them form. It is the same light; the mediation of the

[71] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 361.5.

barzakh/prism has merely conditioned it. Not coincidentally, leading scholars in the field of liminality use precisely the same metaphor of a prism to illustrate their concept (Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015, 1).

The streams of light on either side of the prism are not identical, in that one is relative or conditioned and the other, absolute or unconditioned. In this, the prism of the *barzakh* performs the transformative function characteristic of the liminal passage. Another difference between the two kinds of light is that the relative/prismatic is dependent on the absolute/pure, while the reverse is not the case: the absolute exists independently of the relative (Chittick 1994, 33; Schimmel 1975, 5). Also, as with any refracted light, the intensity of (relative) illumination diminishes the farther it travels from its (absolute) source (Chittick 2016, 89).[72] Hence, the colourful manifestations of created phenomena are but pale reflections of divine glory.[73]

A further important distinction differentiates the indivisible unity (*tawhīd*) of the Divine from its multivocal and multivalent expressions. In this context, the *barzakh* could be pictured as an isthmus standing between the oceans of dualistic and non-dual perception. Here, in particular, the *barzakh's* paradoxical function as both unifier and divider is worth bearing in mind.

The first phase of van Gennep's tripartite ritual structure might be compared to the light that enters the transforming liminal phase of the prism, while the relative display of colours corresponds to the third, post-liminal phase of aggregation or incorporation. The first phase, in predating both the liminal and incorporative phases, stands independent of either, while the third phase is meaningless absent the first two.

In its essence, the *barzakh* is the action of differentiating between any two entities. In this, the *barzakh* limits the definitions of the objects of differentiation. Thus, it is

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[72] The theme of the Divine as pure light, and of creation as progressively compromised forms of light, arises at several points in the development of Islamic philosophy, perhaps most explicitly in the *Ḥikmah al-Ishrāq* of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi (Fakhry 1997, 142).

[73] In Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding, the prism is human nature itself—specifically as exemplified in the form of the complete human being, discussed below.

indispensable to understanding either, since without such limits no entity can be clearly perceived. This explains Ibn al-'Arabī's use of the term "limit" to describe the *barzakh*. Yet in the very process of differentiating, the *barzakh* must necessarily unify, for "difference itself is a relation, the most unifying of relations" (Bashier 2004, 87). Here again, in its simultaneous, paradoxical inclusion and exclusion of its limiting poles, the *barzakh* precisely reflects the nature of the liminal passage.

For Ibn al-'Arabī, all phenomena are suspended between existence and non-existence (Chittick 1989, 94).[74] This suspension implies a constantly fluctuating process of differentiation, because only God is utterly changeless; and because, as the Qur'ān tells us, "Each day He is upon some task"[75] (God's "day", Ibn al-'Arabī tells us, is an instant, while His "tasks" are His creatures) (18). Any given thing—a rock, a tree, a person—is continually "crossing over" between existence and non-existence. Hence, that thing stands in continual differentiation from all other things, as well as from itself (Bashier 2004, 23). It is from this perspective that Shaykh al-Akbar concludes that "the root of all things is difference" (Chittick 1989, 67).[76] This being the case, the *barzakh* is an innate function of reality: the "Limit" that enables definition, differentiation, and unity (Bashier 2004, 86). This *barzakhī* function, again, reflects the inevitability and ubiquity of the liminal, as previously described.

In respect of other aspects of the *barzakh* as described here, of course, the analogy does not hold. Nonetheless, I am not arguing that Shaykh al-Akbar's *barzakh* perfectly reflects van Gennep's system, only that the correspondences are sufficient to offer meaningful connections between the *barzakh* and the arguments presented in the previous chapter.

Meaning and Metaphor

Relative phenomena, for Ibn 'Arabī, are rooted in their meanings, which themselves

[74] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 303.28.
[75] Qur'ān 55:29.
[76] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 518.12.

embody spiritual reality. Meanings inhabit the highest of three Presences or Worlds,[77] which is associated with intellect, intelligence, or reason (*'aql* or *ma'nā*). This Presence—"the world of the absent"—is accessible by means of insight. The lowest Presence is the sensory world (*ḥiss*). As "the world of the witnessed", it is apparent to ordinary eyesight (Chittick 1998, 258–9).[78] In between these two worlds lies "the World of Imagination (*khayāl*) or Images (*mithāl*)" (1989, 14)—a *barzakh* that comes into being through the meeting of the other two Presences (1998, 258–9).[79] In this, the third Presence mirrors Eisenstadt and Giesen's "trichotomic" dividing line, discussed earlier (1995, 78).

Shaykh al-Akbar asserts that imagination, as "the world of the domination", is closer to meaning than to the senses, as demonstrated by its ability to affect sensory experience (as in physical reactions to dream events) while the reverse does not obtain[80] (Chittick 1998, 260).[81] Elsewhere, however, Ibn al-'Arabī contradicts this assertion in submitting that "sense perception is the nearest thing to imagination". He reasons, here, that imagination depends on sensory forms to create its realities (1989, 122).[82]

The *barzakh*, or third Presence, is "the manifestation of meanings in sensory molds"— that is, metaphor itself. Ibn al-'Arabī offers such examples as faith represented as a handle, and knowledge as milk[83] (Chittick 1998, 258–9).[84] Meanings descend into this *barzakh* of imagination, or metaphor, where they may

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[77] Chittick (1998, 258) defines a Presence as "the sphere of influence of a specific [divine] attribute [or name]", and notes that Ibn al-'Arabī often uses the term synonymously with "world".

[78] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 42.5.

[79] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 42.5.

[80] It could perhaps be argued that hypochondria constitutes an instance of sensory cues prompting imaginary realities. Further, the content of dreams is not infrequently influenced by sensory experiences such as pain, digestion, and libidinal events. The physical effects of hallucinogenic substances also invoke vivid imaginary experience. However, whether imagination prompts sensory experience or the reverse is, for the purposes of this study, a technical point not germane to its argument.

[81] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 609.17.

[82] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 361.5.

[83] A reference to a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad interprets a "dream-vision" in which he was given a cup of milk as indicating the receipt of knowledge (Chittick 1989, 119).

[84] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 42.5.

remain as imaginal objects or continue to the lower Presence to manifest in sensory form. Whichever manifestation obtains, the meanings remain essentially unchanged—just as a chameleon retains its identity although its colours shift depending on its environment (259).[85]

Shaykh al-Akbar's three-Presence system makes it clear that the *barzakh,* like the visual blind spot, is indispensable to human cognition, since it brings together the forms we ordinarily perceive at the gross material level with the meanings abiding in the spiritual/intellectual realm (Chittick 1989, 122).[86] For Ibn al-'Arabī, therefore, the third Presence is "the centerpiece of the necklace" and "the most perfect world" (1998, 259),[87] bridging as it does the gap between formless meaning and meaningless form. In this sense, says Shaykh al-Akbar, the *barzakh* "is the root of the origin of the cosmos"—a perceptual device God has put in place so that we can perceive His meaning in the images we understand as cosmic reality (1989, 124).[88]

Yet the *barzakh* does not always necessarily serve a hierarchical function. Ibn al-'Arabī uses the example of a *barzakh* separating two white objects, for instance, explaining that it simultaneously unifies them in manifesting the same essential whiteness as both. This, Shaykh al-Akbar continues, demonstrates "the image of the true *barzakh*": the oneness of the two different objects in their essential whiteness (Chittick 1998, 335).[89] When any two objects are compared, Ibn al-'Arabī further explains, some common factor must be present in order for the comparison to make sense. Thus, in contrasting black and white, "color brings the two together" (184).[90] Black and white, since they are obviously not identical, are separated by a *barzakh* on the basis of their difference. But black and white have equal claim to the designation "colour"—which, as the essence of this particular *barzakh*, unifies the

[85] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 677.12.
[86] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 306.3.
[87] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 390.4.
[88] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 183.8.
[89] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 518.1.
[90] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 273.21.

two apparent opposites. In the same way, red and green are distinct in their unique properties, but "one in their luminous substance" (1994, 16).

Another metaphor Ibn al-'Arabī uses to explain the *barzakh* is the production of ink, which in his day was apparently made by combining "gallnuts and vitriol".[91] When these two unlike entities are brought together, the result cited here is not, significantly, ink itself, but "blackness" (Chittick 1998, 259).[92] In other words, the task of the *barzakh* is to enable an effect, rather than to produce a tangible third entity. Indeed, cosmic phenomena are, in fact, the "effects" or "properties" of the divine names of God—themselves a *barzakh* between God and humanity (1989, 39).[93] This aspect of the *barzakh* recalls Greco and Stenner's understanding of liminality, cited in the previous chapter, as provoking specifically experiential events (2017, 25). As a liminal phenomenon, the *barzakh* functions precisely to invoke an effect.

Al-Khayāl, "Imagination"

> As the very stuff of the self, imagination is the encounter between the vitality of intelligence and the signs and sediments perceived by the senses.
> —William C. Chittick, "The Disclosure of the Intervening Image: Ibn 'Arabī on Death"

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, "[a]ny two adjacent things" are separated/unified by a *barzakh* he calls *al-khayāl* (Chittick 1989, 17), most often translated as "imagination" (Morris 1995, 1).[94] Imagination, in this sense, manifests at three nested levels: in the cosmos, in the macrocosm, and in the microcosm (Akkach 1997, 103). At the cosmic level, existence is itself imagination—specifically, nondelimited imagination, or the divine imaginary (Chittick 1989, 15–16). In the macrocosm, an imaginal realm lies between the spiritual and corporeal worlds; this is delimited

[91] Gallnuts are plant growths, caused by insects or parasites, containing concentrations of tannin. "Vitriol" probably refers, here, to the sulfuric acid used to produce ferrous sulfate.
[92] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 42.5.
[93] The divine names and their relationship to cosmic reality are explored further below.
[94] At the same time, every phenomenon is itself a *barzakh* (Chittick 1989, 14).

imagination, in that it is constrained by human limitations. In the microcosm, imagination is the domain of the soul, which separates/unifies body and spirit (115–6).

Significantly, the designation of imagination confirms that the *barzakh* is not a static or passive function, but is actively creative. Far from referring to the mere capacity for fantasy, imagination in this sense opens the portal to a "universal reality" (Morris 1995, 3): an imaginal (versus an imaginary) zone accessible to human consciousness through dreams, spiritual epiphany, and prophetic vision (Corbin 1995, 11).[95] Henry Corbin has famously named this domain the *mundus imaginalis*: a world as real as any available to our physical senses and mental capacities—a "noetic value" that is accessible via our cognitive faculties (1–5); but, explicitly, not by means of our physical senses (Chittick 1989, 118).[96]

For Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-khayāl* lies at the heart of a dynamic cosmology. As an expression of the divine imagination, it gives rise to creation itself (Chittick 1989, 118). It is that which separates the knowable from the unknowable, the existent from the non-existent, the intelligible from the unintelligible, and objects of affirmation from objects of negation. Yet in itself, the imaginal realm as *barzakh* cannot be definitively characterised as existent, non-existent, intelligible, unintelligible, affirmed or denied (Morris 1995, 7). Ibn al-'Arabī illustrates this enigma through the example of a mirror. The person regarding herself in the mirror understands that what she sees is not, in fact, herself, and yet it is not other than herself. Thus, Shaykh al-Akbar concludes, for this person to say that she has seen herself is as true a statement as to say that she has not (Chittick 1989, 118).[97]

Ibn al-'Arabī was not the first to contemplate the imaginal realm: by the time his writings emerged, Muslims had long explored the notion of an intermediate

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[95] This realm is also discovered after death (Chittick 1989, 354, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 295.21 and 296.15). In this, it constitutes a link to the exoteric understanding of the *barzakh* as a purgatory-like limbo.
[96] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.
[97] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.

subjectivity. Earlier Qur'ānic exegesis proposed that the human capacity to produce mental images—imagination—entered the newly created Adam when God blew His breath, or spirit, into the dense clay of the man's corporeal form. In this sense, Chittick conflates imagination with human identity—that which separates clay from conscious existence—and places it precisely at the point where the divine light meets the darkness of creation (2002, 54).[98] This gloss appears to match the understanding of *barzakh* found in Qur'ān 25:53, as the isthmus separating the "sweet and pure" unconditioned Divine from "salty and bitter" conditioned humanity.

The universe, too, is a *barzakh.* Neither the self nor the universe can be said to either exist or not exist; rather, "[b]oth shimmer endlessly between light and darkness" (Chittick 2002, 54). They are suspended between actuality and impossibility; between Being and nothingness. Without the intermediary capacity of *al-khayāl*, the chasm between absolute and relative realities could never be bridged.

The ultimate non-existence of corporeal reality had been proposed somewhat earlier by Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, who interpreted the Qur'anic proclamation that "[e]verything will perish save His Face"[99] to mean that everything other than God "is perishable eternally and everlastingly and could not be imagined otherwise". Here al-Ghazālī prefigures Ibn al-'Arabī's view of the material world hanging suspended between existence and non-existence, for in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (*Niche of Lights*), he proposes that all phenomena are in themselves "pure nothing". They derive their existence only through the regard of God, who infuses them with being by turning His face toward them (Fakhry 1997, 97–8).

For Ibn al-'Arabī, human beings are part of the imaginal realm. He calls this realm "discontiguous"—that is, it is not contingent on a human imaginer. It is an "objective world 'out there' known as imagination" (Chittick 1989, 117). I understand this "discontiguous realm" to be a synonym for the cosmos, or the lowest of the three

[98] In this sense, humanity might be glossed as Eisenstadt and Giesen's "trichotomic boundary" between the Divine and the material world (see Chapter Three and footnote 73, above).
[99] Qur'ān 28:88 (Fakhry, trans.).

Presences. Shaykh al-Akbar contrasts this realm with another he calls “contiguous”, and which he conflates with the human capacity for imagination.

As a *barzakh*, the discontiguous realm cannot be perceived by the physical senses; nonetheless, it is intelligible as an ontological phenomenon. Here, again, Ibn al-‘Arabī resorts to the metaphor of the mirror (Chittick 1989, 117–8).[100] The discontiguous realm, as a reflection, is a definite manifestation that is available to ordinary vision. But at the same time, it is nothing but an image, impossible to bind or capture. Both the person before the mirror and her reflection are imaginal; thus, the only “fixed entity” (*‘ayn thābita*) present in this configuration is the surface of the mirror, itself. This is, precisely, the *barzakh* (Bashier 2004, 89).

Ibn al-‘Arabī sees the “contiguous” realm, the human capacity for imagination, as a synonym for the soul (Chittick 1989, 117).[101] It is the world of dream images, and as such, is constantly fluctuating (1998, 60). This type of imagination is a function of human perception, and vanishes with the disappearance of the imaginer. Like the light dispersed by a prism, the contiguous realm is dependent on the presence of the imaginal/discontiguous, rather than vice versa (1989, 117–8).[102]

All of created reality—the subject and its reflection, contiguous and discontiguous imagination—is dependent on nondelimited imagination, a synonym for the cosmos as God’s “Self-manifestation” (Chittick 1988, 56). This is the “Supreme or Highest Barzakh”, for it lies between God and nothingness, making the relationship between these two opposing realities possible (1998, xxvi). Chittick explicitly differentiates the Supreme Barzakh from the intermediate zone between the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The Supreme Barzakh of the imaginal dissolves distinctions between opposites of every kind, from exoteric dualities such as depth and surface to more metaphysical pairings such as manifestation and non-manifestation. In every case, thanks to the intermediary power of the human imagination, all such dyads “coalesce

[100] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.
[101] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 311.19.
[102] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.

and become one" (2002, 54). Thus the self as *barzakh* brings together body and spirit in a single expression.

In my reading of Bashier (2004, 82),[103] the Presence of Imagination is apprehended only through Unveiling, which Chittick defines as God-given knowledge untainted by rationality or reflection (1989, 63). Chittick's translation of the relevant passage conflates "unveiling" with "insight", introducing a potentially confusing overlap between the means of apprehending the "world of the absent" (the highest of the three Presences) and the world of imagination, respectively (119).

As noted earlier, insight grants access to the highest Presence; thus it would appear, at least from this translation, that it is by means of insight that we apprehend both the higher realm of the spirit and the *barzakh* between it and the lower, sensory world, or lowest Presence. Perhaps Ibn al-'Arabī is implying here that the spiritual seeker's valid perception in the intermediary, imaginal realm makes access to the higher realm of meaning similarly available.

There is another possible interpretation of this apparent overlap, however. As noted, the imaginal world is described as distinct from the corporeal world of sensory perception. Yet the imaginal, for Ibn al-'Arabī, contains everything we perceive. Here we find another overlap: what is the world of the senses, if not the cosmos and everything in it? Indeed, Shaykh al-Akbar remarks that "a corporeal body exists simultaneously in two places" (Chittick 1989, 124).[104] From this perspective, the distinction between the material world and the *barzakh* separating it from the higher realm becomes unclear.

It may be that these apparently blurred lines point precisely to the fluid, ambiguous nature of the *barzakh* itself. For an "outstanding characteristic" of the imaginal is its continual fluctuation (Chittick 1998, xxvi)—and, concomitantly, the impossibility of identifying clear boundaries. Elsewhere, Ibn al-'Arabī asserts that the cosmos undergoes "constant transmutation" (60), which is a fundamental attribution of

[103] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 198.23–28.
[104] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 282.18.

liminal dynamics.

Since it permits of no fixed character or content, the *barzakh* represents a realm of infinite potential—"the most all-embracing of engendered things" (Chittick 1998, 60).[105] In this, it opposes a notion of reality as preoccupied with doctrinal or historical phenomena that are perceived as unchanging. The liminal ambiguity of the *barzakh* thus directly contradicts the logic of those actors who assert religious orthodoxy through rigid adherence to ideological fixities.

Existence and Non-Existence

As indicated, Ibn al-'Arabī's "imagination" is simultaneously separative and unitive, thereby representing a *barzakh* that lies between corporeal reality and the spiritual realm. It cannot be characterised as either material or discarnate, yet it embodies aspects of both realms (Chittick 1988, 53). Although it might seem self-evident that the phenomenal world is identical with corporeal reality, for Shaykh al-Akbar the cosmos and all it contains—humanity included—is located in the *barzakh* of imagination. As such, the cosmos is suspended between, and equidistant from, existence and non-existence (1989, 94).[106]

In Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology, everything that comes into existence has a prior actuality in God's imagination. As part of the divine "knowledge", it subsists as pure potential, resting in God's knowledge as an aspect of His Being (*Wujūd*)[107]—until God has "clothed it in the robe of existence" (Chittick 1989, 85).[108] Ibn al-'Arabī reasons, therefore, that everything other than God is a "possible thing" (1998, xx). Its possibility may be realised as existent or non-existent, depending on God's acknowledgement of it in the course of His "Self-finding". Since every phenomenon is an expression of the divine attributes, it comes into existence through God's recognition of it as an expression of His *Wujūd* (20). In perceiving it thus, God gives

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[105] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 311.2.

[106] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 303.28.

[107] According to Chittick (1998, xix), *wujūd* "is typically translated as 'existence' or 'being' but … literally means 'finding.' …To speak of *wujūd* is to speak of finding and what is found, and finding is meaningless without knowledge and consciousness. *Wujūd*, then, is that which finds and is found."

[108] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 320.14.

"preponderance" to its existence over its non-existence (1989, 82).

The notion of the "possible thing" is clarified in Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphor of the universe as shadows cast by God's light. A shadow depends on the shape of what stands between the light and the surface the light shines upon. In the absence of that obstruction, the shadow is bereft of form, though it may exist conceptually as a potential of the absent obstruction. The universe, from this perspective, is a collection of shadows cast by God's light falling on the divine names (Abramahov 2015, 8).[109] The everyday phenomena we perceive in our world are shadows of forms whose true existence subsists in the divine Reality. Ibn al-'Arabī cautions that the distance of these shadows from the Light responsible for their existence further distorts our perception of their true character (70). In another passage, Shaykh al-Akbar warns that to turn away from one's own shadow is to ignore one's possibility, and thus to turn one's back on God (Chittick 1989, 94).[110]

It is not the case, however, that God's command—"Be!"[111]—removes any given possible thing from the *barzakh* and establishes it in true existence. Rather, it becomes an "existent possible thing". Its quiddity as a possible thing is not the same as its existence as a cosmic phenomenon, for it has always existed immutably in God's knowledge, where it remains eternally possible. Thus it is that the entire cosmos, humanity included, is by its nature located in a field of possibility until "clothed in the robe of existence" or subjected to God's "preponderation". Non-existent possible things, from this perspective, are non-existent only from our relative perspective, since they have always existed in God's nondelimited imagination (Chittick 1989, 83–6).

When anything comes into relative existence—that is, becomes an existent possible thing—it enjoys that status only for the merest instant.[112] This is because everything

[109] See the section titled "The Divine Names", below.
[110] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 303.28.
[111] Qur'ān 16:40.
[112] So swift is the "crossing over" (Bashier 2004, 23) between existence and non-existence that it is essentially instantaneous (Chittick 1975/6, 79). According to Abrahamov (2015, 118), in fact, "the moment of a thing's nonexistence is the same moment of the existence of its like".

other than God undergoes constant change (Chittick 1989, 96). Existence, in its essence, is itself movement (1975/6, 117). Ibn al-'Arabī sees the arising of phenomena in each moment as "new creation".[113] Since each emergence reflects divine names, the names are necessarily infinite (Chittick 1989, 42). God, as Sheer Being (95),[114] never ceases to bring the possible things into existence. Since they are never the same from one moment to the next, the previous manifestation of each entity is destroyed in its re-emergence; thus, God is constantly engaged in simultaneous creation and destruction (Abrahamov 2015, 9). Shaykh al-Akbar refers to this process as "perpetual renewal" (Chittick 1989, 97).[115]

This brings to mind the notion of "perpetual liminality", which, as described above, has been applied in a positive sense to liminal social passages that fail to resolve into stability. Shaykh al-Akbar's "new creation" reflects both the unending change characterising cosmic reality as *barzakh* and the beneficial nature of God's activity in ensuring continual renewal.

How God determines the fate of any given "possible thing" depends on that thing's relationship to the Divinity. In Ibn al-'Arabī's construction:

> If you relate yourself to Me, I receive you; and if you relate yourself to nonexistence, it receives you, for you are between Being and nonexistence. (Cited by Chittick 1989, 94)[116]

In incorporating the potentials of both existence and non-existence, the *barzakh* of possible things unifies these two seas.

Three categories of existents are evident in this construction: the earthly, the imaginal, and the numinous. Henry Corbin proposes two matching triads: the three "organs of knowledge" of the senses, imagination, and intellect, related to the body,

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[113] "Did we fail in the first creation? But they are in confusion over a new creation" (Qur'ān 50:15; Sahih International trans.). The notion of the cosmos as perpetually in the process of creation is not original to Ibn al-'Arabī; this view was also asserted by Ibn Rushd (Fakhry 1997, 120–1).

[114] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 216.7.

[115] *Citing Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 320.3.

[116] *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 303.28.

soul, and spirit, respectively (1995, 8).

Ibn al-'Arabī, too, offers a number of triadic constructions in this context. For example, the three levels of "known things" residing in the realm of the possible include the sensory (corporeal); meaning (intellectual); and the meeting of meaning and the sensory (imaginal), where the rational faculty gives conceptual shape to meanings (Chittick 1989, 115).[117] The same three levels—bodies, images, and spirits—may be glossed as "basic worlds of the cosmos" (1998, 78).

The diversity of the created world is actualised precisely through the differentiation between these three levels, however glossed. In Ibn al-'Arabī's words, "He [God] gave existence to two sides and a middle so that the entities would become distinct within the One Entity" (Chittick 1998, 77–8).[118] In other words, there is ultimately no reality but God, "the One Entity"; but through God's tripartite arrangement of reality, multiplicity is actualised. Evident in this construction is the crucial role of the *barzakh* as the locus of differentiation.

The Divine Names

Any understanding of Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology must rely on at least an elementary grasp of his view of the divine attributes or names.[119] He submits that God has infinite names, of which the ninety-nine commonly assigned to Him[120] are merely

[117] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 66.14.
[118] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 415.18.
[119] Ibn al-'Arabī uses the term "names" as the legal Islamic designation of God's qualities. Those of "sound rational faculties", he proposes, call these same qualities "relationships", for they are dynamic expressions of the *barzakh* between God and the cosmos. Shaykh al-Akbar associates the term "attributes" with those of "imperfect rational faculties": i.e., the Muslim philosophers whose fixation on rational discovery he criticises (Chittick 1989, 34). For the purposes of this study, "names" and "attributes" are used synonymously.
[120] The attribution of "one hundred Names less one" is found in a hadith recorded by Sahih al-Bukhari in his *Book of Invocations* (https://sunnah.com/bukhari/80/105; accessed 5 February, 2019). Which names are included in the 99 differs somewhat according to various hadiths.

"Mothers",[121] "Presences",[122] or "finite roots"[123] (Chittick 1989, 42).

Ibn al-'Arabī understands the divine names as relationships between God and the cosmos. They have no ontological existence; rather, they are "non-entities within entities", or abstract properties known only by their effects. Lest the believer take the multiplicity of the names to imply that God Himself is multiple, Shaykh al-Akbar notes that it is only our relative view that attributes diversity to the names. From God's perspective, they are an undivided unity. Each name has two meanings: its manifestation as a facet of God's Essence, and its signification of the relative property that distinguishes it from all the other names and designates a unique relationship between God and His creation (Chittick 1989, 35–7).[124]

For Ibn al-'Arabī, the divine names constitute a *barzakh* between ourselves and God (Chittick 1989, 39). In becoming manifest, the names fulfil the mirroring capacity of the *barzakh* in reflecting divine Reality back to itself. This process constitutes an interpenetration of the Real (which Ibn al-'Arabī uses as a synonym for God)[125] and creation (124). This interface is necessitated by God's divine aspect, which implies an inherent relationship between Creator and creation. As Chittick remarks, "[a]s soon as we have said 'Divinity,' we have also said 'cosmos'" (65).

Only God is ultimately real, and it is therefore beyond our capacity to understand either God or reality. We are limited by our relative worldview; conditioned by the dualistic, either/or functionality of the created world. Thus we misunderstand the apparent contradiction in the divine names underlying existence—as, for example, The Expediter and The Delayer, or The Avenger and The Forgiver. All apparent contradictions arise from this fundamental misapprehension of the divine reality, and

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[121] Chittick cites *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 288.1 in support of this designation for all ninety-nine names. However, Abrahamov (2015, 33 n35) speculates that Ibn al-'Arabi's reference to "the mothers" probably means only the "seven basic attributes": the Living, the Omniscient, the Willer, the Omnipotent, the Speaker, the All-Seeing, and the All-Hearing.
[122] Citing the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* 65.
[123] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 288.1.
[124] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* IV 419.7.
[125] Chittick (1989, 133) translates *al-Ḥaqq* as "the Real", and reports that Ibn al-'Arabī uses the term synonymously with "Being"—and "Being is Allāh".

this error inevitably leads to conflict (Chittick 1989, 67–9).[126]

Here, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s worldview offers an intriguing glimpse into the dynamics contributing to violence. The names of God constitute the prism through which the Real is made manifest to our senses. They derive from a single, non-dual source, or pure light, but once that light passes through the prismatic *barzakh* of the names, it splits into multiple and mutually distinct colours, leading inevitably to conflict. “The root of conflict and mutual aversion”, says Shaykh al-Akbar, “is the divine names …: Life-giver and Slayer, Exalter and Abaser, Harmer and Benefiter.” These apparent contradictions prompt quarrels even among angels (Chittick 1989, 68).[127] Since the divine names constitute the sole source of cosmic phenomena, then, conflict—and concomitantly, violence—is virtually built into the structure of phenomenal reality.

This imaginary supports my argument that dualism lies at the root of violence. It may be concluded that the remedy lies in a shift from fixation on God’s relative attributes to an embrace of His essentially indivisible Essence. But from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s point of view, our relative angle of vision presents us with an irreconcilable paradox: in turning away from the conflictual implications of the apparently contradictory names, we perpetrate the very dualistic error that leads to conflict. To oppose dualism and non-dualism, in other words, itself constitutes a dualistic error. Happily, however, Shaykh al-Akbar offers us an escape route. His is an unconditionally inclusive view that accommodates apparent contradictions in the recognition of God’s *wujūd* in all phenomena.

Ultimately, God and His creation—that is, the unity of the divine light and the multiplicity of its manifestations—are not separate (Fakhry 1997, 81). Thus, as in Burckhardt’s analysis of the *barzakh*, the difference between ultimate and relative views is merely perspectival. God as the Pure Light and Pure Good is not other than His attributes as manifest in the cosmos. The Creator and His creation, while not

[126] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 98.19.
[127] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 251.29.

identical, are inseparable (101). Furthermore, all seeming opposites are reconciled in God (Chittick 1989, 70). Accordingly, Ibn al-ʻArabī declares, "[w]e do not say that the names are He, nor are they other than He" (Abrahamov 2015, 48).[128]

The nature of the imaginary hearkens back to the nature of the liminal, in that ordinary logic is defeated in the deconstruction of familiar hierarchies. Dualism may be considered the most fundamental of such hierarchies, for as Plumwood argues, the mere assertion of binaries implies attributions of superiority and inferiority, respectively (1993, 41). As liminal space, the *barzakh* challenges us instead to see the multiplicity of phenomena as a manifestation of their ultimate unity.

Through the conciliation of perceived contradictions, the distinction between the possible and the impossible is erased, for the imaginative faculties of God's creatures are an aspect of, and consequently are empowered by, His nondelimited imagination. Thus it is that philosophers can "suppose the impossible" in seeking proof for their hypotheses. If the impossible had no relationship to existence, Ibn al-ʻArabī argues, it would be inaccessible to supposition (Chittick 1989, 124).[129]

What transforms the impossible into the possible is the attribution of meaning, which originates in God's knowledge before being "sent down" to the highest Presence, the abstract World of Sovereignty (Chittick 1994, 74). The imagination, as the liminal space between this meaning and the sensory realm, joins the two. God may then decide to bring this impossibility, now imbued with meaning, into the realm of possible things (1989, 124).[130]

Meaning is a function of intelligence, while sensory forms are material; thus, the two are naturally opposed. It is precisely the strength of the imaginal *barzakh* that accomplishes the impossibility of bringing them together, in the form of the cosmos. Hence, according to Ibn al-ʻArabī, imagination expresses God's divine name as "the Strong" (Chittick 1989, 115).

The cosmos described in this worldview is a dynamic realm that defies fixed

[128] Citing "The bezel of the wisdom of holiness exists in the essence of Enoch", Chapter 4 in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.
[129] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 312.4.
[130] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 312.4.

definition. It neither exists nor does not exist. It cannot be either affirmed or negated. It is home to all possible things, yet it also accommodates the impossible. As *barzakh*, it is intelligible, yet "only imagination"; it is an ontological entity sans "origin or root". At the same time, however, the *barzakh* truly exists as "the root and origin of the cosmos". It is "an objective world 'out there'", independent of our capacity to imagine it (Chittick 1989, 117–8).[131]

As a liminal space, the cosmos as *barzakh* is a realm of transformation, for it is here that humanity has the potential to realise itself as a complete manifestation of the divine attributes. As the third Presence, imagination offers the faithful an opportunity to receive God's meanings in the light of possible existence. It is only to the extent that they seize this opportunity that they may enter the postmortem *barzakh* assured of entry to Paradise.

Al-Insān al-Kāmil, "the Complete Human Being"

Humanity is a microcosm of the universe. Its form is the template on which the entire cosmos is configured (Sells 1984, 291). So intimately are the two related that Ibn al-'Arabī refers to the universe as the "great human being". The cosmos, and the beings inhabiting it, are nothing other than the manifestation of God's attributes or names (Chittick 1994, 33–4).

All worldly phenomena embody certain names in particular combinations, reflecting God's multiplicity. But human beings, uniquely endowed as they are with all of the divine names or attributes, reflect His unity. Most humans, however, manifest the names unevenly: we may favour Abaser over Exalter, or Avenger over Forgiver. In this, we demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the indivisible nature of the unitary source of all the names. Furthermore, we displace the divine attributes with human attributes arising from caprice and self-will. The path to perfection entails shedding the latter so that the former may properly manifest (Chittick 1994, 32–7).

[131] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.

In certain human beings, however, the full range of cosmic functions is manifest in perfect balance. The locus of this ideal manifestation is the complete human being, or *al-insān al-kāmil.*[132] This pinnacle of God's creation is exemplified in Adam, precisely because of his knowledge of the divine names, which distinguished him even from the angels. Each angel embodies only a single name, or attribute (Sells 1984, 291–2); Adam, by contrast, was entrusted with all of the names.[133] In this, the complete human being represents the self-disclosure of the Divine (Chittick 1998, xxvi).

Adam's embodiment of the names made it possible for Reality to see itself reflected whole cloth back to itself. God, in other words, perceives His own attributes—the qualities intrinsic to the created world—in the reality of the complete human. It is in this sense that *al-insān al-kāmil* serves as the most perfect isthmus between the Divine and the cosmos.[134] As Michael Sells puts it, before the creation of Adam the names "were the keys to a treasure house without the treasure house" (1984, 292). For Ibn al-'Arabī, this pinnacle of human manifestation in fact reflects the true nature of every person (Chittick 1989, 27–8) and is realised in the prophets of Islam (1994, 31).

For most human beings, the names are expressed unevenly: some of us lean toward names such as Abaser or Creator of the Harmful, while others favour Nourisher or Forgiver. In *al-insān al-kāmil*, all of the names are perfectly balanced (Chittick 1994, 48). In this, the complete human being affirms the ultimate unity of God; yet at the same time, each complete human being is unique in her or his quiddity. While Adam and Muhammad (for example) are identical in being perfect embodiments of the divine attributes, in their unique aspects as men of their respective times, places,

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[132] This Arabic term is more commonly translated as "Perfect Man". I prefer Sells's translation of *al-insān al-kāmil*—"complete human being"—for both its gender impartiality and its avoidance of the multivalent and thus imprecise attribution of the term "perfect". (Ibn al-'Arabī distinguishes between the terms "complete" and "perfect", ascribing the former to any created entity and the latter to humans who have realised their spiritual potential [Chittick 1989, 296–7, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 405.3]). Ibn al-'Arabī scholar Sa'diyya Shaikh (2012, 82) notes that Shaykh al-Akbar repeatedly asserts the ungendered nature of *al-insān al-kāmil* and the equal accessibility of this high spiritual level to both men and women.

[133] Qur'ān 2:31–3.

[134] In another sense, however, a *barzakh* lies between God and *al-insān al-kāmil* (Chittick 1998, 77, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 286.32). This is consistent with Shaykh al-Akbar's assertion that a *barzakh* exists between any two phenomena (Chittick 1989, 17).

physiologies, and temperaments, they also manifest the diverse forms of creation (Chittick 1998, xxvi). Thus it is that *al-insān al-kāmil* embodies both the divine unity and the diversity of creation, for the archetype embodies the very paradox of reality.

In another sense, the complete person simultaneously expresses God's incomparability (*tanzīh*) and His similarity with His creation (*tashbīh*). For *al-insān al-kāmil* at once embodies both the infinity and immutability of divine reality and the moment-to-moment finitude of the possible things suspended between existence and non-existence. The archetypal complete human being, like God, is eternal, unmanifest, divine, and infinite; while at the very same time, *al-insān al-kāmil* fully embraces the temporality, manifest nature, humanity, and finitude of every other created person (Chittick 1998, xxvi). In this paradoxical expression, the complete human embodies the ultimate *barzakh*, the Supreme Barzakh: the imaginal space between God and the cosmos (1989, 125).[135]

Thus it is that *al-insān al-kāmil* serves as the quintessential prism, not merely refracting but actually lending colour to the luminous theophany that is the phenomenal world. For this reason, Ibn al-'Arabī tells us, the world's "realities and archetypes" are subject to *al-insān al-kāmil* as God's viceregent (Chittick 1975/6, 5). This suggests that the imaginal world, itself, falls under the authority of this perfect creation, the complete human being.

A famous hadith reports that God created the world because He wished to be "known".[136] Only human beings are capable of knowing God, because only they are endowed with the full complement of God's divine attributes. In this "knowing", humans reflect the ultimate truth of those attributes back to God. But before the creation of *al-insān al-kāmil*, reflections in the mirror of the world remained merely phantasmal (Sells 1984, 308). In order to reveal the big picture of the ultimate Reality—the full complement of divine attributes in perfect balance—the mirror

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[135] Chittick (1989, 125) identifies this "Supreme Barzakh" with "the Reality of the Perfect Man".

[136] "*I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known: so I created people—and all the creatures (al-khalq)—so that I might be known"* (Morris 2003, 330; emphasis original). According to James W. Morris (ibid.), this was among Ibn al-'Arabī's favourite "divine sayings".

needs polishing. The complete human being embodies the polishing of the mirror of the created world (292).[137]

As the original complete human being, Adam became the *barzakh* that, by standing between God and creation, united them (Chittick 1998, xxvi). Thus, for Ibn al-ʻArabī, the calling of the complete human being into existence implies a much deeper reality than merely the birth of the human race. It actualises the capacity of the created world *qua* mirror to reflect its own manifestation back to *al-Haqq*—the Truth, the Real, or the Ultimate (Sells 1984, 290–1). Through *al-insān al-kāmil* alone, and specifically through its unique manifestation of all the divine names, God is able to view the reflection of Reality. Thus, the complete human being is required in order for God to perceive Himself as "known" (292; 293 n10).[138]

Good and Evil

In Ibn al-ʻArabī's worldview, everything that exists is good—in fact, it is "identical with the Sheer Good (*al-khayr al-maḥḍ*), who is God" (Chittick 1989, 290).[139] Since all existence derives from God, no essential evil can be attributed to any aspect of the phenomenal world. Ultimate evil, as the opposite of God, is "absolute nonexistence (*al-ʻadam al-muṭlaq*)", which by definition is "impossible" (87).[140] Ibn al-ʻArabī never capitalises the word "evil", for no ultimate Evil can exist.

Qur'ān 2:216 cautions that human attributions of good and evil are untrustworthy.[141] In any case, such determinations can apply only to relative situations because at the level of our temporally delimited realm, good and evil are strictly relative. Here, evil

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[137] Ibn al-ʻArabī's partiality to visual metaphors perhaps somewhat reflects (!) a double entendre encoded in the Arabic word *insān*, which can mean both "human being" and "pupil" (of the eye) (Sells 1984, 292).

[138] God is self-sufficient, and therefore not in need of anything. His desire to be "known" initiates a reciprocal dynamic in which human and Divine nourish one another. Sells (1984, 308) suggests that absent the complete human being, the universe remains a fixed intellectual construct, or "shadow reality". In such a reality, God cannot be "known".

[139] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 528.6.

[140] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 248.24.

[141] "Fighting is enjoined on you, and it is an object of dislike to you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know" (Shakir, trans.).

is not the opposite of Good, but rather an "accident"[142] or misapplication that befalls entities on the basis of human convention or personal preference (Chittick 1989, 292).[143]

This logic is clarified in Shaykh al-Akbar's discussion of "base" versus "noble" character traits. The former, he tells us, are accidental, while the latter are essential because they are supported by Reality. God's noble character traits are the very nature of the cosmos, and like God, have no opposite. Since God represents the whole of the Real, ignoble character traits have no basis in reality. Human beings do, of course, manifest traits such as cowardice, avarice, arrogance, and the like, but these are simply misapplications. With proper guidance—specifically, the example of the Prophet—they can be turned to noble ends (Chittick 1989, 306–7).[144]

If evil is merely an accidental non-essential "property" (Chittick 1989, 291)[145] assigned by humans, it follows that evil can also be seen as a relationship. The divine names are also described as properties and relationships (39), but their effects are seen in the nature of the cosmos itself. As such, the names are "nonexistent relationships (and not concrete entities)" (Abrahamov 2015, 45). The names derive from the Real, whereas evil is identical with absolute non-existence. This is why the properties associated with the names produce tangible effects in the form of cosmic phenomena, while evil is incapable of producing any such effects.

Ibn al-ʿArabī argues that if evil were "an ontological quality", it would be attributable to God, the source of everything (Chittick 1989, 290).[146] But a Prophetic saying explicitly rejects the possibility of any ontological relationship between God and evil: "The good, all of it, is in Thy hands, while evil does not go back to Thee" (Murata and Chittick 1994, 107). Or, as Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks, "There is no evil in

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[142] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 315.6.
[143] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 576.2.
[144] Cowardice, for example, may be applied to fear of committing sin; avarice to desire for religious understanding; and arrogance to being "arrogant in God toward him who is arrogant toward God's command" (Chittick 1989, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 687.12).
[145] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 389.21.
[146] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 528.6.

the Root" (Chittick 1989, 291).[147] Here Shaykh al-Akbar hints at an almost Zoroastrian struggle between good and evil: we human beings, suspended as we are between existence and non-existence, are tugged at by both, each of which seeks to co-opt us as denizens of its domain. By choosing to obey God's command, "Be!" we "help Him against this nonexistent impossible" (87).[148] God, in return, supports every entity that has obeyed His call to existence: namely, created phenomena, including ourselves.

Ibn al-'Arabī does, however, grant the relative existence of evil in the dualistic world of opposites (Abrahamov 2015, 13). In fact, he considers it intrinsic to the created world: "The world of creation and composition requires evil by its essence" (Chittick 1998, 310).[149] Shaykh al-Akbar bases this observation on the Qur'anic assertions that God is light,[150] while the created world is dark.[151] It follows that all ignorance and misdeeds are native to the created world, or "nature". Yet nature, though dark, is receptive to light (311). It is the believer's obligation, then, to turn toward the divine light.[152]

Once existent, beings suffer evil only "accidentally". Such "accidents" occur precisely because of the *barzakh* in which the possible things await existence or non-existence. In Ibn al-'Arabī's system, the accident of evil occurs when non-existence "gazes upon the possible thing" as it hangs suspended in the *barzakh*. The possible thing itself experiences happiness or suffering to the extent that it identifies with

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[147] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 315.6.

[148] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 248.24.

[149] At the same time, however, "good belongs to the cosmos in its essence" (Chittick 1989, 289, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 389.21). The apparent contradiction between these two statements may be glossed as a reframing of Ibn al-'Arabī's insistence that good is innate, while evil is accidental: while the cosmos "*requires* evil by its essence", good "*belongs to*" it (emphases added).

[150] Qur'ān 24:35.

[151] Qur'ān 39.6. This verse refers to creation occurring in "three darknesses". Ibn al-'Arabī identifies two of these as "the darknesses of the land and sea" mentioned in Qur'ān 6:63. The third darkness is a mixture of these two in the form of the "rationally speaking" human soul (Chittick 1998, 309, citing Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya III 141.31).

[152] Once again, this construction seems to reflect a Zoroastrian dualism. It must be recalled, however, that Ibn al-'Arabī is speaking here to a relative, rather than an ultimate, reality.

existence or non-existence (Chittick 1989, 291).[153] Thus it is that we live suspended "between Good and evil" (94).[154] As an aspect of God's creation, however, our fundamental disposition inclines us to the Good (1994, 63).[155]

Ibn al-'Arabī also offers a more direct and conventional explanation for evil-doing: the work of the Devil. Although it is innate in created existence, evil is not inherent to the human soul, which is essentially good. This goodness is rooted in the divine breath that enspirited the clay from which Adam was fashioned. Here Ibn al-'Arabī quotes the Prophet's proclamation that "[g]ood is a habit, and evil is an obstinate persistence"—specifically, the Devil's obstinate persistence in prompting the believer to oppose God's commands and prohibitions. Succumbing to this seduction, however, is forgiven as coerced behaviour. In this way, the fundamental goodness of the human soul is joined with divine mercy, such that what began well (with God's creation of humanity) ends on the same positive note (Chittick 1998, 313).[156]

Shaykh al-Akbar's approach to questions of good and evil, once again, highlights the liminal nature of the cosmic *barzakh*. Ambiguity remains central to his view of human conduct; indeed, "God's Mercy applies to both the good and the evil. With respect to itself, the evil is good and vice versa" (Abrahamov 2015, 179). Thus, Ibn al-'Arabī declines to admit of any fundamental moral dualism. Relative evil, for him, is merely "deviation" from humanity's true disposition, and vanishes when its cause—the evil-doer's unwise choice—is no longer operative (Chittick 1994, 114).

Heaven, Hell, and the *Barzakh*

The Qur'ān issues multiple cautions about the wages of good and evil, respectively. The good, we learn—those believers who conduct themselves according to the

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[153] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 207.33.
[154] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 303.28.
[155] Here again, Ibn al-'Arabī inserts an apparent contradiction, arguing that humans' origin in non-existence naturally places us closer to evil than to good (Chittick 1989, 87, citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 248.24). I read this assertion in the context of God's mercy, rather than of Ibn al-'Arabī's analysis of basic human nature with respect to good and evil—for "God's Mercy applies to both the good and the evil" (Abrahamov 2015, 179). It may once more be helpful to invoke the distinction between absolute and relative realities.
[156] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 182.23.

instructions of God as transmitted through the Prophet—will attain the Garden of Paradise.[157] Those who do not will be consigned to the Fire of Hell.[158]

The Qur'ān identifies both the Garden of Eden and the abode of God and His angels as "Paradise".[159] As the postmortem destination of the pious, Paradise is described as an actual, arboreal[160] location characterised by pleasure and delight.[161] The Qur'ān prophesies that the Day of Judgement will be heralded by a single shout or trumpet blast,[162] accompanied by earthquakes and the crumbling of mountains.[163] At that time, the dead will be sorted into three groups:[164] the "Companions of the Right Hand", the "Companions of the Left Hand", and the elite "Foremost".[165] This description appears to promise an end to the ambiguity and chaos of the *barzakh*, with an orderly and predictable "station constantly secure".[166]

Paradise comprises two richly carpeted gardens[167] in which the saved will recline on silk-lined couches[168] and cushions,[169] where they will converse without vanity or falsehood.[170] Here, they will enjoy every variety of low-hanging fruit,[171] poultry,[172] delicious wine that neither intoxicates nor toxifies,[173] and the company of modest

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[157] Qur'ān 78:31–6.
[158] Qur'ān 78:21–2.
[159] Qur'ān 7:13 and 19. The Sahih International and Muhsin Khan translations refer explicitly to "Paradise" in both verses. In the case of God's abode, most other translators refer simply to a "state" and to Eden as "the Garden" (although not always capitalised). In Qur'ān 89:30, the same Arabic word—*aljana*—has been variously translated as "garden", "heaven", and "Paradise". Linguist Franklin D. Lewis (2012, 182) traces the depiction of paradise as a garden to an Iranian word, *pairadaeza*, meaning "walled enclosure" and referring to a park or private garden.
[160] Qur'ān 55:48.
[161] Qur'ān 37:43.
[162] Qur'ān 37:19.
[163] Qur'ān 56:4–5.
[164] Qur'ān 56:7–10.
[165] Ali, trans.
[166] Qur'ān 44:51 (Ghali, trans.).
[167] Qur'ān 88:16.
[168] Qur'ān 55:54.
[169] Qur'ān 88:15.
[170] Qur'ān 78:35.
[171] Qur'ān 55:52.
[172] Qur'ān 56:21.
[173] Qur'ān 37:45–7.

and beautiful virgins.[174] The denizens of these "everlasting Gardens" will be adorned with splendid clothes and precious ornaments,[175] and waited upon by "immortal boys".[176] A reading of Sura 56 suggests that these rewards are reserved for the Foremost, who will dwell closest to Allah.

The Companions of the Right Hand, although not as richly rewarded as are the Foremost, will nonetheless find themselves in a garden fed by underground rivers, clothed in silk, and adorned with bracelets of gold and pearl.[177] Here, they will enjoy refreshing shade under thornless lote and banana trees; pure, gushing water; bountiful fruit regardless of season; raised couches; and the ubiquitous "chastely amorous" virgins.[178]

Those who flout God's commands and cleave to false beliefs, by contrast, will spend aeons in Hell. For them there will be no comfort, only scalding hot water and (depending on the translation) either pus or extreme cold.[179] For shade, they will have black smoke;[180] for food, the demon-headed fruit of the Zaqqum tree. This hideous meal will be washed down with boiling water.[181] Sinners will be dragged on their faces into the fires of Hell,[182] where they will be clothed in fire while more scalding water is poured over their heads and they are tortured with hooked iron rods.[183]

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[174] Qur'ān 55:56. The Qur'ān does not detail what delights Paradise may offer the women, who are nowhere depicted as conversing, eating fruit, or drinking wine. They do, however, recline on "green cushions and beautiful fine carpets" (Sahih International). These virgins are "confined to pavilions" (Shakir), where they are "close guarded" (Pickthall), "cloistered" (Ghali), or "restrained" (Khan) (Qur'ān 55:72–6). These cautions raise interesting questions about the extent to which either the male or female denizens of Paradise are trustworthy in respect of having attained full moral perfection.

[175] Qur'ān 35:33 (Khan, trans.).

[176] Qur'ān 56:17 (Khan, trans.).

[177] Qur'ān 22:23.

[178] Qur'ān 56:27–37 (Ghali, trans.)

[179] Qur'ān 78:22–5. Muhsin Khan specifically identifies such persons as "polytheists, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah, hypocrites, sinners, criminals, etc."

[180] Qur'ān 56:43.

[181] Qur'ān 37:62–7.

[182] Qur'ān 54:48.

[183] Qur'ān 22:19–21 and 44:47–8.

The Zaqqum is "the Tree cursed in the Qur'ān"[184] and rooted in the bottom of Hell.[185] The Arabic root of Zaqqum (Z-Q-M) suggests voracious consumption of food (Lewis 2012, 185): an image supported by the Qur'anic description of sinners filling their bellies with the Zaqqum fruit,[186] which boils inside like molten brass (or "murky oil", depending on the translation).[187]

In an interesting contemplation on the mirror metaphor, literary scholar Franklin D. Lewis speculates that the Zaqqum tree might represent an inversion of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden, the original earthly paradise. The mirror, in this construct, is the temporal world as lodged between heaven above and hell below—a *barzakh*. The Edenic tree is iconographically represented with angelic faces on its leaves, while the budding fruit of the Zaqqum resembles the heads of devils.[188] Perhaps, Lewis concludes, the two trees are in fact one, manifesting as either benign or demonic in dependence on the spiritual orientation of the viewer (2012, 186).

If, as Ibn al-'Arabī asserts, there is a *barzakh* between any two entities, heaven and hell must meet at their own isthmus. The notion of a *barzakh* separating the Garden and the Fire is somewhat affirmed in Qur'ān 57:13:

> On the Day when the hypocrites men and women [*sic*] will say to the believers: "Wait for us! Let us get something from your light!" It will be said: "Go back to your rear! Then seek a light!" So a wall will be put up between them, with a gate therein. Inside it will be mercy, and outside it will be torment.[189]

In this verse, the *barzakh* consists in a gate separating mercy from torment (or doom, punishment, or Wrath, depending on the translation). As a *barzakh*, however, this gate can also be understood as a mirror. This possibility offers intriguing possibilities with respect to the ultimate non-duality of heaven and hell, and accordingly of good and evil. Chittick argues that for Ibn al-'Arabī, the wall between heaven and hell is

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[184] Qur'ān 17:60 (Ghali, trans.).
[185] Qur'ān 37:64.
[186] Qur'ān 37:66 and 56:53.
[187] Qur'ān 44:45.
[188] Qur'ān 37:65.
[189] Khan, trans.

itself mercy. He bases this on a translation that describes the gate or door as separating the "nonmanifest" side of mercy from the "manifest" side of chastisement. Since only the nonmanifest is eternal, according to Shaykh al-Akbar, chastisement is delimited and must necessarily end (Chittick 1994, 117). In this view, Ibn al-'Arabī strongly opposes those theologians who predict eternal torment for the wicked (114).

The cosmos is a *barzakh*, not only between God and materiality, but also between heaven and hell. This characterisation goes back to the divine names, specifically those of Mercy and Wrath. While Mercy predominates in the Garden, the Fire is a manifestation of God's Wrath. In the temporal world, suspended in between the two, we experience a mix of both. Ibn al-'Arabī takes this to mean that the divine attributes manifest similarly in our world as in hell. In neither case is Wrath eternal (Chittick 1994, 112)—for Mercy trumps all others in the hierarchy of divine names (Abrahamov 2015, 7).

Following his logic regarding good and evil, Ibn al-'Arabī declares that the punishment of hellfire exists only in the realm of imagination. God will deliver sinners from their torment at the end of times, precisely because of the ultimate Good inhering in the divine names. Here, Shaykh al-Akbar's credo merits an extended quotation:

> So the All-compassionate takes *vengeance* upon wrath through His mercy, and the All-compassionate is *severe in assault*. Through mercy he *abases* wrath and *holds back* its reality.[190] Hence the property of the mutual contradictoriness of the names subsists in the relationships, but the creatures are drowned in mercy. The property of mutual contradictoriness remains forever in the names, but not in us. (Chittick 1994, 115–6; emphases original)[191]

In this way, attributes that at first appear negative are turned to positive effect, for "in the divine overview, wrath derives from and leads back to mercy" (Chittick 1989, 23). Shaykh al-Akbar applies this same logic to ways the pious can utilise attributes

[190] Shaykh al-Akbar's uncharacteristically inelegant gloss here strikes this reader as his attempt to make the fundamental paradox of his imaginary accessible to the rational, dualistic mind.

[191] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 346.14.

such as cowardice, arrogance, and avarice in the service of their faith. From this perspective, there are no essentially good or bad traits. Because reality is perspectival and relational, acts must generally be judged entirely on their effects.

From the Qur'anic descriptions of the afterlife, it would seem that a stable state of incorporation awaits even the evil-doer.[192] However, that state will not equal the bliss of the pious, for former sinners will never be permitted a vision of God; rather, they will remain "veiled" from Him. Thus, while all beings will eventually experience bliss, those liberated from the Fire will know a lesser bliss than that bestowed on the "people of the Garden". But even this veiling is an expression of God's mercy, since it accords with the dispositions of those subjected to it. Ibn al-'Arabī even suggests that given a choice, those consigned to hell would choose the Fire, "just as a fish chooses water". For them, the Garden would be a domain of suffering, due to their inability to perceive its splendour. Those consigned to the Fire will actually praise God for allowing them to "find their joy" in the flames (Chittick 1994, 116–8).

Paradox and Inclusivity

Even the most superficial reading of Ibn al-'Arabī reveals that God's reality embraces both/and.[193] Gnosis, in fact, can arise only from combining the apparently contradictory notions of God's incomparability (*tanzīh*) and similarity (*tashbīh*) with His created forms (Chittick 1989, 69). In the inseparability of these two qualities, God is at once "He/not He" (4).

From this perspective, the *barzakh* as simultaneously "only imagination" and "an autonomous presence" (Chittick 1989, 117)[194] is not so difficult to apprehend. This is particularly true in the sense that the *barzakh*, the imaginal, is said to possess the characteristics of both existence and non-existence. Hence, the paradox of Ibn al-

[192] See e.g. Qur'ān 2:162.
[193] To contrast both/and with either/or would be to insert a *barzakh* within a *barzakh*, initiating an infinite regress. To be true to its meaning, both/and necessarily includes either/or.
[194] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 311.19.

‘Arabī’s *barzakh*: nothing other than *barāzikh*[195] exist, and existence is itself a *barzakh* (14). It is like a mirror, a prism, a dream (188–9). (And of course, these metaphors are themselves *barāzikh*: Shaykh al-Akbar’s third Presence, the “centerpiece of the necklace” that links divine and corporeal realities [Chittick 1998, 259].[196])

Ibn al-‘Arabī notes that the realm of possible things—i.e., temporal reality—does not tolerate opposites (Chittick 1989, 115). And yet without the existence of opposites, “nothing would happen in the cosmos”.[197] This apparent contradiction serves to underline the necessity of the *barzakh* as mediating “[a]ny two adjacent things” (17). Its simultaneously separative and unitive nature is what makes all cosmic opposites at once congruent and irreconcilable.[198]

The Sufi who has experienced the “unveiling” of God’s truth recognises the unity of conventionally perceived oppositions: “the existence of the opposite within its own opposite” (Chittick 1989, 243).[199] This insight, Ibn al-‘Arabī cautions, is not available via rational endeavour; it requires the perspective granted to those of a spiritually advanced “waystation”. Here, we meet again the *barzakh* as only ostensibly separative. At the ultimate level—as apparent to Shaykh al-Akbar and similarly accomplished practitioners—it is in itself the coincidence of opposites. Just as the prism and the mirror are required in order to mediate God’s *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, so the *barzakh* makes possible the particular impossibility of reconciling opposites.

Further, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *barzakh* is more robust than are the entities on either side of it, for it is not delimited in its capacity to bring form out of formlessness, possibility out of impossibility, and essential subsistence out of essential non-subsistence

[195] The plural of *barzakh* (Burckhardt 1979, 2).
[196] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 390.4.
[197] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 462.11, 463 12, 27.
[198] At the ultimate level, the name “Allah” resolves all apparent contradictions between the seemingly opposed divine names (Chittick 1989, 59).
[199] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 605.14.

(Chittick 1989, 124).[200] This function is precisely characteristic of liminality, in its role as the anti-structure from which structuration emerges (Thomassen 2009, 5). Just as liminality provides an analytical tool capable of clarifying nuanced subject matter, the *barzakh* as "imaginal presence" (Chittick 1989, 116)[201] is the most reliable lens through which to perceive things as they are. Thus the ambiguous, dynamic, non-corporeal, non-conceptual world of the *barzakh* is paradoxically more ontologically stable than are, for example, either good or evil. Perhaps this is why Shaykh al-Akbar proclaims it "the most perfect world" (124).[202]

This argument relies on the coincidence of opposites in the dualistic mode. It falls away in the face of Sheer (or ultimate) Good, which has no opposite. Here again, Ibn al-'Arabī confounds rational attempts to hew reality into opposed dualities. The example of good and evil is just one of many examples, which include the divine names (Chittick 1989, 59); meanings and sensory forms (115); and existence and non-existence (Bashier 2004, 104). All existents, in fact, are "it/not it" (Chittick 1989, 116). This construction makes nonsense of any rational basis for conflict. As simultaneously "it" and "not it", neither I nor my adversary can be located on either side of the *barzakh* between us. Indeed, we *are* that *barzakh*, in the context of which no exclusion is possible.

Exclusion, as argued in a previous chapter, is an essential component of violence. Shaykh al-Akbar's rejection of exclusion as opposing the very nature of the Divine is, as has been demonstrated, located precisely in his understanding of the *barzakh*. Accordingly, I argue that an incisive exploration of Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh* offers the potential for rich arguments against violence that are based in religious ideology. As such, these arguments might find more favour in religious extremist circles than do exhortations against violence as inimical to piety.

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[200] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 183.
[201] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 379.3.
[202] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 183.

The *Waqt*

The *waqt* is a class of *barzakh* typified by immediacy and the presence of the Divine. The word has been various translated as "the present moment" (Chittick 1989, 38); "time" (Schimmel 1975, 220); "a timeless instant" (Renard 2005, 159); and "the eternal Now".[203] It is an instant where time, experience, and identity meet (Sells 1996, 99).

The *Treatise of Qushayrī* offers several descriptions of *waqt*, including "the moment between … the past and the present" (Sells 1996, 100).[204] Similarly, ninth-century mystic Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz refers to it as a moment lying between past and future. Qushayrī further describes this moment as a sword that separates the "two non-existents" of previous and future experience. The venerable Sufi sage Junayd of Baghdad calls it "the breath between two breaths" (Böwering 1992, 83). Clearly, the *waqt* is a *barzakh*, an ineffable liminal phenomenon lying in between knowables.

The *waqt* stands outside the conventional flow of time. It represents, in fact, a metaphysical dimension; for in meditation, Sufis "[draw] eternity from its edges in pre- and post-existence into the moment of mystical experience" (Böwering 1997, 61). The *waqt* is a "time-out-of-time"; "the eternal within time"; "the constantly renewed eternal moment"; the locus of the dissolution of distinctions between the eternal and the ephemeral (Sells 1994, 106–8).

Yet the *waqt* is not simply a temporal phenomenon. Böwering reports that Sufis understand human beings "as being, not having, time or *waqt*" (1997, 61). Here, the distinction between being and its dimensional coordinates falls away. Ibn al-'Arabī takes this blurring of boundaries still further, arguing that the *waqt* encompasses not just the human being and her moment of presence, but also the breath of the Divine, which gives life to humanity. Moreover, it is the breath of the Sufi, the one who receives the divine exhalation as inspiration and pronounces *dhikr* (remembrance of God) with her own outbreath. Thus,

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[203] Professor Omid Safi of Duke University's Islamic Studies Center, email message to author, October 7, 2016.
[204] The *Qushayriyyan Treatise* is attributed to Abu 'l-Qasim al-Qushayrī. Sells (1996, 97) calls it "perhaps the most popular classical work on Sufism, admired for its subtlety, acuity, and clarity".

> the complex terms dhikr, "moment," and "breath" are fused in a unified dynamic of recreation and transformation, a dynamic where the moments vary with the subject, as opposed to the uniform instants of the physical theory on which the new theory has been superimposed. (Sells 1994, 107)

From this perspective, the *waqt* is not a temporal or spatial location but a mode of being equivalent to *fanā*, or "nullification of the mystic in the divine presence" (Schimmel 1975, 144). In the *waqt*, the Sufi aspires to "a complete giving over of the self to each moment, as if that moment were the totality of one's existence" (Sells 1996, 99). The dissolution of conventional boundaries between time, space, person, and divinity in the *waqt* entail the "passing away" of the practitioner's previous identity. Under these conditions, binary distinctions between self and other or Us and Them fall away.

Conclusion

In the experience of Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh,* the Us-versus-Them construct falls apart. This is primarily due to his insistence on the non-dual nature of reality, as described above. Shaykh al-Akbar obligingly offers a rational explanation for the collapse of distinctions between self and other, summarised here by Bashier:

> Something defines itself through a process of differentiating itself from all relation to Other. But differentiating is a sort of relation. By differentiating itself from Other, Something relates itself to Other. To avoid this paradoxical situation, Something seeks to differentiate itself from all relations to Other, *including the relation of difference from Other*. But the only way Something can differentiate itself from difference to Other is by making Other disappear in it, that is, by uniting with Other. Hence, by completely differentiating itself from Other, Something completely unites with Other. (Bashier 2004, 88; emphasis original)

The simultaneous activities of differentiation and relation are precisely the function of the *barzakh*. The more ardently Us strives to rid the world of Them, the more helplessly it is united with the reviled Other.

To apply this dynamic to contemporary instances of religious violence is to ask probing questions about the verisimilitude of the perceived differences between the conflicted parties. Such questions may not be of interest to the parties themselves, as

it is in the nature of the Us-versus-Them dynamic that any suggested commonalities between the two are likely to be roundly rejected. Researchers into entrenched hostilities may, however, find such explorations relevant. Might it be the case that research into religious violence, by failing to question the reification of the combatants' mutually incompatible positions, contributes to maintaining and even deepening these antipathies? I argue that the ferocious continuation of religious violence in spite of researchers' best efforts to mitigate it invites at least consideration of this possibility.

This logic may be extended to the broader binary of violence versus non-violence. In this context, I submit that reflexive rejection of violence and the concomitant demonisation of its perpetrators may obstruct innovative approaches to both research and strategy.[205] The fact is that violence exists, continues, and is perhaps intensifying (Flannery 2016, 243). Academic analyses are an important resource for those activists and mediators whose primary business is the search for remedies, making their tone and structure consequential beyond the academic frame of reference (Omer, Appleby and Little 2015, ix–x). Were research into religious violence to take a bolder and more inclusive approach, this shift could not help but affect the broader cultural context.

Hence, I argue that the *barzakh* as hermeneutic opens an intriguing possibility of radical inclusion, and suggest that it may provide important clues to the riddle of human conflict, in which the question of evil—what it is, and to whom is properly belongs—becomes central. Given Ibn al-'Arabī's view, which conflates evil with absolute non-existence, nothing in existence is inherently evil, including violence.

I am not proposing a re-examination of violence in an attempt to find a presumed good in it. In addition to its impracticability, this approach would constitute another unreflective recourse to a presumed binary, the very assumption of which may be the root of the problem. Rather, I argue that bracketing the automatic ascription of wrongness and badness to violence could open promising new research pathways

[205] Historian of religion Catherine Wessinger (2006, 169–72) argues, for example, that a less adversarial and moralistic approach on the part of federal authorities to the Branch Davidian group might well have averted the tragedy that occurred in Waco, Texas in 1993.

into an enduring and destructive phenomenon. The very difficulty of contemplating such an approach speaks eloquently to our deeply embedded tendency, as researchers, to resort to the good/bad, right/wrong binaries that Ibn al-'Arabī so incisively critiques.

Finally, the *barzakh* as liminal space specifically embraces ambiguity, fluidity, and, especially, paradox. These qualities, applied with Doniger's due "responsibility to the data" (1998, 36–7) may add potentially helpful nuance to scholarly research into the religiously prejudiced conflict so prominent in current global affairs.

Ibn al-'Arabī frequently reminds us that distinctions between relative dualism and the non-dual nature of reality are not concrete, but perspectival: fabrications, in fact, rooted in dualism itself. Rendering into secular language the assertion that God is Himself "the (very) opposites",[206] it might be argued that a vaster, more encompassing view of conflict may prove to be more in accord with the dynamics of reality than is the conventional understanding of irreconcilable opposition. To cite a literary giant of Western culture, F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Hence, I argue that shifting one's perspective to a more inclusive understanding of conflict—mirroring, perhaps, Shaykh al-Akbar's own reconciliation of the apparently contradictory divine names—might conceivably reveal a path toward greater inclusivity in the objects of analysis.

To embrace the antinomian view proposed here will, of course, place the researcher in an academic *barzakh*: an ambiguous realm fraught with risk and devoid of guarantees. Yet as is the case with all liminal passages, this *barzakh* also holds the promise of transformation. Further, genuine progress typically demands a departure from established orthodoxy. Just as Ibn al-'Arabī dared to challenge the theological status quo of his day, I submit that scholars of religious violence might contemplate the relative advantages of exploring an approach that, from a conventional perspective, may seem implausible—and further, that a close reading of Ibn al-

[206] An assertion by Tāj al-Dīn al-Akhlāṭī that Ibn al-'Arabī cites in support of his own view (Bashier 2004, 139).

‘Arabī’s view of the *barzakh* may offer promising clues for such exploration.

Chapter Five: The Bardo

> If we don't act on our craving for pleasure or our fear of pain, we're left in the wide-open, unpredictable middle. The instruction is to rest in that vulnerable place, to rest in that in-between state, to not hunker down and stay fixed in our belief systems but to take a fresh look with a wider perspective.
> —Pema Chodron, *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*

Bardo is a Tibetan word commonly applied to the intermediate state between death and rebirth.[207] As is the case with popular understandings of the Muslim *barzakh*, the bardo has traditionally been presumed to represent a limbo during which the deceased encounters the consequences of conduct during their lifetime.[208] The word itself is translated as "in between" (Goss and Klass 1997, 380), "between two" (Lopez 2011, 41), or "intermediate state" (Fremantle and Trungpa 1975, xvii). Sogyal Rinpoche translates *bardo* as "a 'transition'" or a gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another. *Bar* means "in between," and *do* means "suspended" or "thrown" (1992, 102).

The standard unqualified use of "bardo" in Tibetan Buddhism continues to define the period between death and rebirth. However, the word has come to refer to "any transitional experience, any state that lies between two other states … an interval, a hiatus, a gap" (Fremantle 2001, 54). Contemporary Buddhist teacher Chökyi Nyima states definitively: "Bardo means the period between two events" (1991, 33). Timothy Scott offers a definition of "bardo" as "the sense of a phase between two successive states of being" (2007, 11). Thus, literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to "[t]he bardo that extends from diagnosis until death" (2005, 180).[209] Anthropologist Aidan Seale-Feldman, translating *bardo* as "between two",

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[207] Buddhist scholar Karma Lekshe Tsomo (2006, 40) suggests that the bardo's terminus is more accurately located at the point of "re-conception"; that is, at the moment when egg and sperm meet.
[208] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "ancestors".
[209] Sedgwick was herself in just such a bardo, having been diagnosed in 1991 with the breast cancer that would kill her in 2009 (Sedgwick 2017).

suggests that the term can even be applied to "a pause between words" (2012, 6).[210]

According to Bryan J. Cuevas, the notion of an intermediate state following death has not been traced to the Buddha himself, but became a topic of debate only several hundred years after his death. The first mention of an "existence within the interval" appeared as far back as the second century BCE, but it has not been determined whether this referred to the consciousness inhabiting an intermediate postmortem state. Elaborate Indian exegeses of such a state emerged only in the second century CE. The version widely accepted today in Buddhist East Asia and Tibet was formulated by the Indian scholar Vasubandhu in the fifth century CE (2004a, 377–8).

Although all Buddhist schools maintain a belief in rebirth following death, the notion of an intermediate period between the two events is confined to adherents of the Mahayana school (Tsomo 2006, 40).[211] Cuevas attributes to the later evolution of Tantric Buddhism, however, the idea that the individual's consciousness traverses from three to six discrete phases within the intermediate state (2004a, 377–8).[212]

It is within the tantric tradition, too, that the notion of six distinct bardos developed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo traces this to the eleventh-century Indian master Naropa, who applied the ubiquitous threefold logic of fundamental Buddhist teachings—the *trikāya*,[213] the three levels of practitioners,[214] etc.—to the process of life, death, and rebirth. Naropa's disciples refined his taxonomy, eventually arriving at the six bardos of Yangöngpa, a thirteenth-century yogi and author:

> (1) the natural state, (2) ripening from birth to death, (3) meditative

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[210] Having frequented Western Vajrayana Buddhist circles for most of my adult life, I can personally attest to the routine use of the term "bardo" to refer to any interval between two experiences of relative stability. Examples include the wait between writing exams and receiving the results, and the period between jobs, projects, or intimate relationships. The defining characteristic of a bardo, in this context, is the insecurity attendant on not knowing—or, as at least one contemporary Buddhist teacher has called it, the experience of "tremendous uncertainty and groundlessness" (Simmer-Brown 2001b, 61).

[211] The Mahayana school of Buddhism—the "great vehicle"—is believed to have emerged in India around the beginning of the common era. It is widely practised today in China, Korea, Tibet, and Japan (*Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "Mahayana").

[212] The term "Tantric Buddhism" has become more or less synonymous with Tibetan, or Vajrayana, Buddhism (see n218, below).

[213] The "threefold pattern of the awakened state": *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *nirmanakaya* (the bodies of truth, enjoyment, and emanation, respectively) (Fremantle 2001, 174).

[214] Dull, middling, and superior.

> stabilization, (4) karmic latencies and dreams, (5) dying, and (6) becoming. (Tsomo 2006, 108–9)

A century later, Karma Lingpa proposed a slightly different distribution of bardos:

> (1) living, (2) dreaming, (3) meditative stabilization, (4) dying, (5) reality itself, and (6) becoming. (Tsomo 2006, 110)

Lingpa's understanding of the bardos is authoritative, for he is held to be the *terton*, or "treasure discoverer", who found the *Bardo Thötröl,* Padmasambhava's definitive teaching on the bardo following death.[215] Yangöngpa's bardo of the natural state is "roughly equivalent" to the bardo of "reality itself" proposed by Lingpa (Tsomo 2006, 110). Nyima collapses "the bardo of the meditative state" ("meditative stabilization" in both Yangöngpa's and Lingpa's taxonomies) and "the bardo of dreams" into "the bardo of this life"—presumably, referencing the first bardo appearing in both lists (1991, 33). This formula produces a total of four bardos: "the natural bardo of this life" (35); "the painful bardo of dying" (82); "the luminous bardo of *dharmata*" (112);[216] and "the karmic bardo of becoming" (147). The latter two occur between physical death and rebirth, although advanced practitioners may achieve realisation in the bardo of *dharmata*, rendering unnecessary any further processing in the bardo of becoming (147).[217] Nyima attributes to Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche the observation that a "great sinner" experiences no bardo at all, but on death descends "directly to the hell realms" (113 n1).

Today, belief in and practices related to the bardo are largely associated with the Tibetan Vajrayana[218] school of Buddhism (Benard 1992, 173). Theologian Robert E.

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[215] Tibetans credit Padmasambhava with establishing Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century, and believe that he buried various important teachings—the *Bardo Thötröl* among them—in the Gampo Hills of central Tibet (Trungpa 1975, xi). A later section of this chapter explores the *Bardo Thötröl* and its relevance to this study.

[216] Tsomo translates *dharmata* variously as "the nature of reality" (2006, 117) and "wisdom of great bliss" (235). Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (2008, 122) calls it "ultimate reality", while Thinley Norbu Rinpoche (2002, 218) cites "the absolute truth". Buddhist scholar and teacher Judith Simmer-Brown (2001a, 290) refers to the *dharmata* as "the intimate life-breath of all phenomena". Altogether, these various glosses suggest a realised understanding of the phenomenal world that transcends relative dualism. (See n233, below, for further synonyms.)

[217] Sogyal Rinpoche (1992, 12), whose *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* made the bardo teachings widely accessible to Western readers, posits these same four bardos. His simplified designations are: life, dying and death; after death; and rebirth.

[218] Vajrayana ("diamond' or 'indestructible' vehicle") Buddhism is also known as Tantric Buddhism, Tantrayana, Mantrayana, and Secret Mantra (Oosthuizen 2017, 2). Some scholars consider Vajrayana Buddhism a subset of the Mahayana (*Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "Vajrayana"). Vajrayana does not possess its own distinctive philosophical position, but bases its doctrine on the Mahayana view (Ray 2001, 81).

Goss and psychologist of religion Dennis Klass suggest that this may be due to the Vajrayana's understanding of the separation of the "life principle" from the body at the time of death (1997, 381).

That said, the notion of an intermediate state between death and rebirth is not exclusive to Tibet. As we have seen, the Islamic *barzakh* represents a similar idea. Several scholars have in fact suggested that the bardo is essentially Tibetan Buddhism's version of the *barzakh*. Scholar of religion Timothy Scott equates the two in their shared function as a space in between experiential states, noting that the *barzakh* and bardo both serve as "the archetypal interface between Transcendence and Immanence" (2007, 10–11). Ibn al-'Arabī scholar Gerald Elmore considers the *barzakh* "[m]ore or less parallel" with the Tibetan Buddhist bardo (1998, 158 n125). Artist and cultural activist Jalal Toufic goes so far as to conflate the two, thus: "*barzakh*/bardo" (2010, 6).

Salman Bashir suggests that the bardo holds a place of importance in the Vajrayana equivalent to that of the *barzakh* in Islam,[219] and encourages "a comparative study between the *barzakh* and the *bardo*" (2000, 319–20 n3; emphases original). The present study, although not explicitly dedicated to such a comparison, presents a preliminary exploration of the two notions and offers some observations on the nature of their relationship.

According to anthropologist Geoffrey Samuel, the intermediate state was known to several of India's philosophical traditions and also found its way to Buddhists in China and the Far East. It was in Tibet, however, that the doctrine underwent extensive elaboration (1993, 210), and where the understanding of the intermediate state in Vajrayana Buddhism was inevitably influenced by pre-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs and practices. Matthew Kapstein reports that the bardo, as now understood through the lens of Tibetan Buddhism, reflects an ongoing process of accommodation in which the alien Buddhist teachings melded with existing

[219] Bashir offers this observation specifically in the context of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

indigenous rites and beliefs (Kapstein 2000, 10). As he explains,

> the Tibetan Buddhist tradition was not … a static replication of Indian antiquity, nor, in its dynamic aspects, was it the product of deliberate contrivance on the part of Tibetans motivated to construct a uniquely Tibetan form of Buddhism. Buddhism in Tibet developed through a sustained and subtle process, whereby the foreign religion achieved a decisive cultural hegemony but was at the same time, as conquerors almost always are, transformed by its own success. (Kapstein 2000, 4)

Accordingly, much of contemporary Vajrayana doctrine concerning death and funerary rites is infused with the shamanistic creeds that predated Buddhism in Tibet (Ray 2001, 4). Philosopher and ethicist Carl B. Becker names Bön as the first such religion to arise in Tibet. In his view, Bön exercised a significant influence on Tibetan Buddhism.[220] In particular, the latter tradition's treatment of death and funerary rites has no resonance with Indian Buddhism (1993, 85–6). Samuel argues that all Vajrayana ritual incorporates "unstated shamanic implications", namely, the resolution of conflict by means of subduing demonic forces (1993, 212).

Prior even to its arrival in Tibet, Buddhist doctrine must certainly already have been influenced by the ancient Indian system of Vedanta, the precursor of what is today called "Hinduism". German Indologist Helmuth von Glasenapp argues that monism is native to the Indian philosophical mindset, giving rise to non-dual doctrines in both traditions. Since Vedanta and Buddhism have coexisted for centuries, he surmises, mutual influence was inevitable. Von Glasenapp further attributes to Vedantic influence the Mahayana assertion that "the highest reality is a pure and undifferentiated spiritual element that represents the non-relative substratum of all phenomena" (1951 and 57). Again, however, that influence will have gone both ways. It has been argued, for example, that the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a central and enduring Hindu text, evidences clear Buddhist influences (Upadhyaya 1968).

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[220] Academic debate continues regarding the interactions in Tibet of Bön, other indigenous animistic religions, and Buddhism. Each has doubtless exercised some degree of transformation on the others. Translator and commentator Giacomella Orofino (1990, 13–14 n1) offers an exhaustive bibliography of works describing the interrelationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Bön. Scholarly attempts to locate Tibetan belief systems diachronically have however proven difficult, as "Tibetan history [is] unknown for its transparency" (Tatz 1978, 3).

How much of the bardo doctrine can be attributed to the Tibetan cultural mindset and/or pre-existing spiritual traditions seems, then, to be largely undecidable. Becker considers "non-Buddhist" the notion of "an intermediate period in which the soul may return" Becker (1993, 86).[221] Kapstein, for his part, notes that the idea of repeated births, deaths, and rebirths was "alien to earlier Tibetan belief" (2000, 5)—at least, in the sense of being universally applicable. He attributes the adoption of this view to the Indian cosmology informing Buddhism's earliest manifestation (43).[222] Fremantle is unequivocal in attributing the central thrust of the Tibetan bardo teachings to Indian Buddhism (2001, 53). Thus the origins of Tibetan Buddhism's bardo tradition remain shrouded in historical ambiguity.

What Is the Bardo?

The term "bardo" is used to describe both the transitional period following death and the "subtle entity" that inhabits that state (Cuevas 2004a, 377). This entity, also sometimes called the "subtle body", is described as "a complex subtle physiology that both coexists with, and functions in constant relationship to, the physical body and its cognitive correlate, the mind" (Miller 2013).

In bridging the corporeal body and the disembodied mind, the subtle body "inhabits an 'in between' mode of embodiment" (Miller 2013)—a semi-corporeal bardo, perhaps, within the temporal bardo of the postmortem passage. Here, what survives the dissolution of the physical body retains its relationship with sensory experience, precisely because cognition and corporeality are inseparable to begin with. Not only are body and mind one within the bardo experience—so, too, are the spatial and temporal realms; for the subtle body "is the field of somatic experience, as it occurs at the present moment" (ibid.).

Donald J. Lopez, Jr. describes that which traverses the bardo as a "bardo being" that spontaneously arises on death in the form of a five- or six-year-old. Although non-corporeal, this form is nonetheless equipped with the shape of the body it will inhabit

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[221] Certainly, the notion of a soul, in the sense of an enduring essence of self, opposes the Buddha's insistence on *anātman* (see the following section).

[222] Pre-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs apparently accommodated the phenomenon of rebirth under certain conditions (Kapstein 2000, 43).

during its next lifetime, complete with fully functioning sense organs. This, Lopez explains, is because the bardo being and the person about to experience rebirth are created by the same karmic cause (2011, 41).

Tsomo reports that Tibetans believe "a very subtle consciousness" continues beyond death (2006, 24). For Nyima, that which leaves the body at the moment of death and passes into the bardo is "the mind" or "consciousness" (1991, 107). W.Y. Evans-Wentz calls it "the Knower, or principle of consciousness" ([1927] 2000, 100).[223] Restating Evans-Wentz's characterisation as "the 'conscious principle'", Ferdinand D. Lessing adds his own gloss: "the Buddhist analogon of our soul concept" (1953, 452). Social scientist Nobuyoshi Yamabe, however, challenges this characterisation, arguing that where the soul is essential and indestructible, the Buddhist conception of consciousness is by nature impermanent, fluid, and "momentary" (2004, 1:175). Significantly in the context of this dissertation, Urgyen refers to whatever continues into death as "the experiencer" (1991, 110).

Anātman

Whatever the nature of the entity traversing the bardo, it can ultimately be understood only in the context of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self, or *anātman*. Since all phenomena are in constant flux, according to this view, that which we consider a "self" is in fact only an impermanent collection of form, sensation, perception, habitual tendencies, and consciousness. With these factors subsisting in continually shifting relationships with one another and the world external to them, there can be no permanent self, soul, or essence—what the Vedic texts call *ātman*. For this reason, the Buddhist doctrine became known as *anātman*: no-self (Sarao 2004, 1:18).[224]

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[223] Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2011, 78–9) notes that Evans-Wentz's 1927 translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is deeply flawed by the translator's misleading claim to Buddhist initiation, coupled with a Theosophist overlay on the Tibetan Buddhist teachings he encountered. Indeed, Evans-Wentz coined the title *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* based on its perceived similarities to the then-popular *Book of Going Forth by Day*, also known as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (102). Accordingly, academic researchers might justifiably approach Evan-Wentz's scholarship with caution.

[224] Significantly, in the context of this study, Buddhism ascribes the dualistic understanding of Us and Them precisely to the illusion of a singular, independent, non-relational self (Makransky 2005, 53).

Who or what then lives and dies? Who or what takes form, experiences sensation, and traverses the bardo? The Buddha is said to have brushed aside this query. Historian of Buddhism K.T.S. Sarao paraphrases his response:

> The question is not "who feels," but "with what as condition does feeling occur?" The answer is contact, demonstrating … the conditioned nature of all experience and the absence of any permanent substratum of being. (Sarao 2004, 1:18)

The invocation of "condition" reflects the Buddhist understanding of all phenomena as conditioned by constantly shifting events and relationships. From this perspective, birth and death are "nothing more or less than oscillating links in the ongoing chain of cause and effect". In the case of persons, cause and effect is essentially synonymous with *karma*: that is, actions and their consequences (Cuevas 2004b, 713).

Francesca Fremantle explains the nature of *anātman* thus:

> So when we ask who is liberated, it is not the self. Liberation is not *of* the self, but *from* the self. If we keep on asking "Who?" we shall only find another "self" who is released from "self." Whenever we try to identify the final watcher, the ultimate experiencer, we are once again creating an imaginary "I." (Fremantle 2001, 37; emphases original)

Accordingly, to enquire into the nature of the entity that subsists in the intermediate space between death and rebirth is to ask the wrong question. And yet there is presumably a presence of some kind suspended between these two events. The deceased has not simply ceased to exist, like a flame once it has been doused. Rather, that flame lights the wick of a new candle. The ensuing flame maintains the fire of the one that lit it, in the form of the previous lifetime's actions, intentions, and aspirations. Yet the new flame has its own identity, so to speak, its own constantly shifting configuration of the causes and conditions peculiar to its location in space and time. Cuevas explains this transition as a "the movement of a continuum of ever-changing mental and physical complexes from one physical support to another" (2004b, 713). The relationship between previous and subsequent manifestations may perhaps be understood to subsist in an energetic trajectory, rather than in a fixed or essential consciousness.

As with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *barzakh*, the bardo is not confined to the postmortem passage. From a Vajrayana perspective, we die in every moment (Ponlop 2008, 2). Each instant of experience is discrete and discontinuous from those flanking it—that is, it endures for a brief instant before dying. In meditation, the practitioner becomes aware of a gap between the death of one moment and the arising of the next. Ray calls this gap “*bardo*, the ‘in between state’”. It is here that the true, non-dualistic nature of reality is said to be revealed (2001, 330–1; emphasis original). Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa asserts that the significance of the bardo holds implications much deeper than concerns about death, rebirth, and the period between the two. Its greater relevance lies in the passage from birth to death—that is, in how we live our lives (1992, 5).

Fremantle notes that, while the bardo serves to separate the experiences on either side of it, it can—like the *barzakh*—also be regarded as a link between them: “a bridge or a meeting place that brings together and unites” (2001, 54). This gloss is further illustrated by Trungpa, who explains that the word *bardo* comprises two elements: “*bar* means ‘in between’ or, you could say, ‘no-man’s-land’, and *do* is like a tower or an island in that no-man’s land”. Trungpa extends this imagery by invoking a river that has allegiance to neither shore, “but there is a little island in the middle, in between” (1992, 3). Again, the metaphor of land surrounded by water brings to mind the isthmus of the Qur’ānic *barzakh*.

However the bardo is glossed, it is classically liminal, for “all bardo experiences are situations in which we have emerged from the past and we have not yet formulated the future, but strangely enough, we happen to be somewhere”. That strangeness lies in the paradox that the bardo “belongs to neither that nor this” (Trungpa 1992, 3–4). It cannot be pinned down. It is, in short, not subject to fixation. This is precisely what makes the bardo a useful and important consideration in the study of religious violence. As in the case of the Sufi *barzakh*, here is an established religious teaching that explicitly rejects the rigidity and stasis typical of justifications for religious conflict.

The Fourth Moment

Trungpa's "little island"—the bardo—represents a moment in time that lies between past and future (1992, 3). However, this is not the "present moment" so widely touted in contemporary self-help circles[225] —that is, the shifting of one's cognitive allegiance from the past or future to the present (Black 2014). Rather, it is "the immediate experience of nowness" (Trungpa 1992, 3). Trungpa calls this experience "the fourth moment", an appellation traditionally applied to the particular instant in the bardo of *dharmata* when the deceased encounters pure awareness (but does not necessarily recognise it as such) (Urgyen 1991, 102). In Trungpa's gloss, this direct encounter with the nature of reality is not confined to the postmortem experience; rather, it begins to assert itself in the bardo of this life, most especially with the ripening of spiritual practice (2017).

Trungpa's invocation of experience holds particular significance in the context of liminality, which, as noted previously, concerns an inescapable phase in the structure of lived experience (Szakolczai 2015, 16). The fourth moment, as an instance of liminality, is not a conceptual event but "an experience that comes from the unconscious mind … a sense of ape instinct or radar instinct" (Trungpa 2017).

"A very precise something or other is happening", Trungpa explains.

> That is the ultimate state of awareness. It is nonverbal, nonconceptual, and very electric. It is neither ecstasy nor a state of dullness. Rather, a state of "here-ness" is taking place, which we have referred to earlier as nowness. (Trungpa 2015, 117)

Trungpa's refutation of the fourth moment as ecstatic is echoed in Qushayri's description of the *waqt* as equally likely to be a moment of sorrow as of happiness (Sells 1996, 100). And it may be both: tenth-century Sufi martyr Ḥusayn bin Manṣūr Hallāj calls the *waqt* "a breeze of joy blown by pain". His biographer Louis Massignon interprets this to mean that anguish and "a divine touch of hope" occur simultaneously (Böwering 1992, 83). Both the *waqt* and the fourth moment, then,

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[225] See, for example, *The Present Moment: 365 Daily Affirmations*, by Louise Hay (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2007) and *The Present Moment Wall Calendar* (Portland, OR: Amber Lotus Publishing, 2018), which features quotations from such spiritual celebrities as Alan Watts and Jon Kabat-Zinn.

transcend binary distinctions to accommodate experiences that would conventionally be regarded as mutually exclusive.

As "fourth moment", the bardo differs from "the present moment" in the important respect that it does not refer to an identifiable point in time, but rather to an ineffable experience. The "present moment" offers no challenge to the consciousness typically dedicated to past and future ruminations. In fact, it grounds that consciousness: when one is present, one knows who and where one is. The bardo consciousness has neither past nor future—nor, for that matter, a present. Like the *waqt*, the fourth moment lies outside the dimensions of time and space (Sells 1992, 66). It is "a state of totality" (Trungpa 2017); "a 'highlight in the middle of nowhere'" (Simmer-Brown 2001b, 61).[226] As such, it may be understood as the experience of simultaneous presence and awareness that lies "beyond the linear succession of thoughts that creates time" and "outside the three times" of past, present, and future (Reynolds 2000, 48–50). Here again, the fourth moment echoes the *waqt*: "a complete giving over of the self to each moment, as if that moment were the totality of one's existence" (Sells 1992, 66).

The fourth moment occurs spontaneously, without intention or effort (Trungpa 2015, 120). This is also true of the *waqt*, which Qushayri defines as "that which happens to them through the dispositions of the real that come upon them without any choice on their part" (Sells 1996, 100). Such moments, according to Junayd, befall the Sufi as "[s]udden gleams of light", and Qushayri quotes the words of an anonymous poet: "O lightning flashing/which folds out of the sky" (70). The fourth moment of the bardo, likewise, manifests as a "brilliant spark or flash" (Trungpa 1992, 3).

The fourth moment reveals the bardo as a mode of being. This gloss makes sense of Cuevas's characterisation of the bardo as both a location or passage and the "subtle entity" undergoing it. Again, much as with the *waqt*, the practitioner *is* the fourth moment, rather than a subject undergoing it. The subject/object duality separating experiencer from experience no longer applies. This phenomenon might be

[226] Simmer-Brown is citing Chögyam Trungpa's description of the bardo. Having failed to find an original source for this quotation, I presume that Simmer-Brown, an early student of Trungpa's, was present when he offered this definition.

considered the Vajrayana equivalent of the Sufi *fanā* (“annihilation” or “passing away”).

As with the *waqt*, the dissolution of conventional boundaries in the bardo has important implications for identity. The entity that both inhabits and is the bardo does not retain the attributes of solidity, duration, or singularity typically associated with a self. Whatever is present for the fourth moment—whether “Knower”, “conscious principle”, or “very subtle consciousness”—it neither retains its previous sense of being nor anticipates its future orientation. The illusory “I” loses its definition, but declines to establish an alternative form. The bardo is, after all, a specifically liminal realm, such that what used to be no longer obtains, but what lies ahead has not yet taken shape. The liminal passage is also specifically transformative; hence, the consciousness undergoing the bardo undergoes a change in what Szakolczai, referring to the tripartite rites of passage overall, calls its very “mode of being” (2000, 188).

Yet as non-dual consciousness, “the state of non-ego”, the bardo cannot be seen as purely a portal to spiritual liberation. “Nothing dissolves into a love-and-lighty [*sic*] beautiful creamy honey lotus lake”, Trungpa cautions. The fourth moment is characterised by the simultaneous manifestations of clear insight and egoic delusion (2017). Even the “clear light” of the awakened state can manifest as “egohood” (1992, 59). This, according to Trungpa, is precisely because it is “experience”, which is necessarily the product of “both black and white, sweet and sour working together” (2017). This, he explains,

> seems to be the whole idea of bardo altogether, being in no-man’s-land, experiencing both at the same time … When you are in such a peak of experience, there is the possibility of absolute sanity and there is also the possibility of complete madness. That is being experienced simultaneously—in one situation, one second, one moment. That seems to be the highlight of the bardo experience, because bardo is in between the two experiences. (Trungpa 1992, 68)

Sufis are familiar with the blurring of lines between sanity and madness. “When a person speaks out of a state of *wajd* (ecstasy)”, Sells reports, “no one who is not in the same state (*ḥāl*) or moment (*waqt*) can understand what that person is saying” (1996, 226). Such utterances express “absolute sanity”, in that they presumably

reflect an immediate dialogue with the Divine; yet from a conventional point of view, they give voice to "complete madness".[227]

Thus it is, Sogyal Rinpoche explains, that "deep uncertainty" is also an essential feature of the bardo.

> [T]he bardo is … a continuous, unnerving oscillation between clarity and confusion, bewilderment and insight, certainty and uncertainty, sanity and insanity. … This means that we face a continuous state of choice between the two, and that everything depends on which we will choose. (Sogyal 1992, 104–5)

Trungpa cautions that the notion of such a choice is a red herring. The real choice, he suggests, lies between the reification of belief and the leap into a reality beyond dualities (1992, 59). Therefore, the practitioner is invited to abandon the illusion of linear spiritual progression and to situate herself, instead, on the "razor's edge" between the desirable and the undesirable, the celebrated and the feared (2017). Here, again, the bardo presents a stark alternative to fixation on religious doctrine, ritual, fellowship, or even experience itself. It opens a realm of potential, a gap in which the possibility of transformation continuously arises (Sogyal 1992, 105). That the bardo reoccurs throughout life and after death means that heightened possibilities of spiritual realisation are continually available.

And yet this potential is available only to the extent that it is paired with profound existential risk. I argue that it is precisely this risk that religious fixation functions to resist. Insistence on a purportedly unchanging reality—whether that ideal is packaged as ideological dogma, religious doctrine, ethnic/nationalistic tradition, or nature—seeks to secure firm, predictable ground in the face of constant change. Yet liminal ambivalence, chaos, and unpredictability are inevitable aspects of human experience. In fact, as argued in Chapter Three, liminal passages are necessary to continuing social transformation, which is itself unavoidable. Attempts to banish them can only stave off their ineluctable emergence; and like the mythical Greek

[227] The Sufi martyr Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Hallāj is exemplary of such paradoxical expression. Rejected by the esteemed Sufi master Junayd as a madman, al-Hallāj was nonetheless regarded by many of his contemporaries as a worker of miracles, able to relieve suffering and fulfil wishes (Ansari 2000).

giant Antaeus, liminality ultimately manifests in human affairs the stronger for having been pushed down. It is precisely this dynamic and its outcome that I have termed “autonomic liminality”.

The Bardo Thötröl

It is apparent from the foregoing that the Vajrayana Buddhist understanding of the bardo is metaphysically charged. It is “a mysterious ground” (Trungpa 1992, 4). The mystery is surveyed in some detail in a fourteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist text called the *Bardo Thötröl,* more commonly known to Western readers as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[228]

Of the six bardos mentioned by Karma Lingpa, only three apply to the transitional period during and following physical death (Cuevas 2004a, 378–9). The other three—dreaming, meditating, and “the bardo of this life (or birth)”—refer to our experiences in the period between birth and death. Thus, “the whole span from birth to death is to be seen as an intermediate state” (Lauf 1989, 36). The bardos of dying, *dharmata*, and becoming arise in the intermediate state between death and rebirth (Fremantle 2001, 55).

The *Bardo Thötröl* presents each bardo as an opportunity to realise “the dissolution of the sense of self in the light of reality” (Fremantle 1987, xvii). Sedgwick explains that such realisation consists in recognising all aspects of phenomena as identical to oneself—including Buddhist doctrine and the apparitions said to appear in the bardo after death. “Clearly,” she remarks drily, “such recognition can be no perfunctory cognitive event” (2005, 175). Or, as Trungpa notes, study of the bardos “is not based on trying to prove logical conclusions”. Although he acknowledges the value of speculation, Trungpa cautions against fixating on “the pleasurable point of intellectualization”. Such fixation, he suggests, means that “the intellect is not being properly cared for” (1992, 5–8). Indeed, wisdom based solely on ratiocination is incapable of ultimate understanding (Lauf 1989, 216).

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[228] The full formal translation of the title is *Self Liberation Through Hearing, During the Intermediate Period that Follows Death* (Norbu 1990, 1).

In other words, the true meaning of the bardo is to be discovered experientally, not rationally. In this, it again faithfully reflects the nature of the liminal, which, as previously noted, manifests as experience, rather than as an object of thought. Like the bardo, the liminal moment precludes access to rational capacity, for liminality subverts the logical basis of ratiocination. The stress and emotional turmoil of a liminal passage also make it difficult to think clearly (Szakolczai 2015, 25). These conditions return the liminar to pure experience, without primary recourse to intellectual analysis or theological speculation. She finds herself on "mysterious ground": a realm that is devoid of both previous and future certainties, unfamiliar, ineffable, and unpredictable. As Szakolczai remarks, "the very structure of society [is] temporarily suspended" (2009, 142).

Here we find, again, the profound difference between the "fourth moment" of the bardo and the conventional "present moment". The present moment may offer one a more immediate and authentic experience of reality than does dwelling on the past or future, but it does not challenge one's consciousness of being located in a stream of linear time. From a Vajrayana perspective, this consciousness is deluded by the apparent continuity of experience. The bardo transcends that delusion by disrupting perceived continuity. It "refers to an aspect of the dynamics of each moment of experience" (Ray 2001, 330–3). Such an event occurs outside both linear time and the dualistic assumptions that structure it. As Szakolczai argues, "experience has a structure of its own" (2009, 146). Ray's "dynamics" also suggest a fluidity that precludes fixed structure. It would seem that Turner's "anti-structure" (Turner 1966) applies to the bardo as to all genuinely liminal moments.

Tibetologist Detlef Ingo Lauf notes that for Tibetans, the bardo "was the moment not only of uniting past and present but also of consciously forming the future" (1989, 47). This may suggest a linear understanding of time, but it could also express a more nuanced recognition of the inseparability of past, present, and future. In the spirit of the bardo, Lauf's gloss may reflect a simultaneous separation and joining of these three elements. I propose that it returns us to Trungpa's "fourth moment", in that the agency to transform one's karmic trajectory arises only in "the experience of nowness". To the extent that consciousness is directed to a perceived external

location—whether that be the past, present, or future—the subject of that consciousness cannot be aware of where she stands relative to suffering or freedom. Consequently, she is bereft of the most immediate and crucial information necessary to direct her course.

Professor of religion Masao Abe proposes that, in Buddhism, transformation occurs in the realisation of the true nature of this moment.

> The realization of the beginninglessness and endlessness of living-dying is inseparably linked with the realization of our living-dying at each and every moment. This is because if we clearly realize the beginninglessness and endlessness of the process of living-dying *at this moment*, the whole process of living-dying is concentrated *into this moment*. In other words, this moment embraces the whole process of living-dying by virtue of the clear realization of the beginninglessness and endlessness of the process of living-dying. Here, in this point, we can overcome *saṃsāra*, and realize *nirvāna* right in the midst of *saṃsāra.* (Abe 1987, 11; emphases original)[229]

Abe's reference to "the process of living-dying" means to undo the dualistic notion of life and death as separate events. "In truth," he asserts, "at each and every moment we are 'living-dying'" (1987, 6). This view recalls Turner's experience with the Ndembu, whose rituals explicitly invoked the death of the initiand to her former life (1966, 48). Death, then, is central to the liminal passage. Without it, the implied rebirth or transformation is not possible.

I understand Abe's emphasis on the suffix "-ness" in the words "beginninglessness" and "endlessness" to point beyond the conceptual content of these words to an immediate, direct engagement with the nature of beginning and ending—that is, the felt experience of these phenomena. Tulku Urgyen affirms this reading in his explanation of emptiness, a central trope in Mahayana Buddhism. The "-ness" in "emptiness", he submits, "is the cognizant quality, so emptiness here should be understood as 'empty cognizance'" (Urgyen 2001, 59). In other words, "emptiness" is not an abstract conceptual overlay on the nature of reality, but an unmediated experience. The "empty cognizance" is a direct engagement with the way things are:

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[229] *Saṃsāra* (Skt.) refers to "the continued round of painful rebirth driven by ignorance and craving" (*Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, s.v. "death"). *Nirvāna* describes liberation from this cycle.

Abe's "living-dying … concentrated into this moment". From this perspective, to attend "the total living-dying at this moment of the absolute present" (Abe 1987, 10) is to enter a profoundly experiential spiritual truth.

Abe's contemplation of transcendence in the context of living and dying places it squarely in the domain of the bardo, which both separates and unites the events on either side of it. Although we conventionally recognise life and death as mutually exclusive phenomena, the Buddhist worldview sees such separation as merely conceptual. The bardo between life and death holds them separate only conventionally and relatively, while simultaneously uniting them at the level of ultimate understanding (Abe 1987, 6). This recalls Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh,* which appears to separate the phenomena flanking it only from a relative perspective. In an ultimate or absolute sense, it unifies them.

Another pertinent aspect of Abe's argument lies in his location of *nirvāna* "right in the midst of *saṃsāra*". *Saṃsāra*, "the immense ocean of suffering" (Patrul 1998, 16), is not the binary opposite of *nirvāna*; they are coexistent and interdependent (Kyabgon 2015, 75). As with life and death, the bardo between them distinguishes the two from a relative perspective, while uniting them at the absolute level. The bardo between the relative and ultimate views also separates and unites.[230]

Relative and Ultimate Truth

The distinctions between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna* closely parallel those found in Tibetan Buddhist texts treating the relationship between dualistic and non-dual realities. The second-century sage Nāgārjuna, founder of the Mādhyamaka thought system, described this pairing as follows:

> Doctrines taught by the Buddha
> Rely wholly on the two truths:
> Worldly concealer-truths
> And truths that are ultimate. (Newland 1992, 3)

Scholar and translator Guy Newland defines the "ultimate" truth proclaimed here as "an emptiness—that is, an absence of inherent existence", while "concealer-truths"

[230] Perceiving the relative and absolute levels of reality as binaries is itself considered mistaken (Newland 1992, 59).

refer to phenomena. These concealer-truths, lacking inherent existence, are necessarily concomitant with emptiness, for they make the attribution of emptiness possible (Newland 1992, 3). Without the relative, phenomenal world, nothing could be considered empty. Thus, the "two truths"—relative and ultimate—while conceptually distinct, are in reality inseparable.

This construction might be glossed as another way of describing the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna*. *Saṃsāra*, or the unsatisfactory, conditioned nature of everyday life, relies on *nirvāna*, a state in which "all cogitation, all worry and rumination, all me-making and mine-making as well as the penchant to conceit are extinguished, no longer desired, stopped, abandoned, no longer grasped".[231] These undesirable mind states precisely describe the nature of *saṃsāra*, demonstrating through apophatic locution the dependence of *nirvāna* on *saṃsāra*. In a binary mindset, neither makes sense except with reference to its opposite. Indeed, this mindset might itself be described as the essence of *saṃsāra*, for "[s]uffering is one's enduring of all forms of opposites, in view of the knowledge of an indescribable absolute, of something deathless, called nirvana" (Lauf 1989, 16).[232]

Saṃsāra and *nirvāna* are separated by the aforementioned "karmic bardo of becoming", which is held to follow the "luminous bardo of *dharmata*". It is here that the practitioner confronts the ultimate choice between rebirth in *saṃsāra* and the attainment of *nirvāna*. In the bardo of becoming, consciousness encounters two types of light: one blindingly, frighteningly brilliant, and the other dull, familiar, and seductive. The brighter light illuminates the path to the higher realms while the softer light leads to rebirth in *saṃsāra* (Fremantle and Trungpa 1987, 41–2). This is a distinctly binary choice, reminiscent of particular Christian and Islamic understandings of heaven and hell.

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[231] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "nirvana", citing the *Majjhima Nikāya* (the Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha) 1, 486.

[232] "It may be useful to note that the terms emptiness, ultimate bodhicitta, absolute truth, prajnaparamita, clear light, radiant clarity, cognitive lucidity, cognitive clarity, luminosity, luminosity of the ground, mother luminosity, dharmata, dharmadhatu, dharmakaya, basic nature, true nature, true nature of mind, true nature of reality, primordial wisdom, primordial awareness, primordial purity, great non-conceptual wisdom and rigpa, while not totally synonymous, are simply various ways of referring to and conceptualizing from a dualistic perspective the same ineffable truth that transcends dualistic and varying perceptions and conceptuality and is the essence or true nature of everything" (Thrangu 1997, v–vi).

Yet the bardo is also what makes *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna* inseparable. Contemporary Buddhist teacher and scholar Thrangu Rinpoche explains that the luminous bardo of *dharmata* constitutes a gap or space between the relative appearances of the previous life and those of the future life about to arise from rebirth. In this liminal passage between the familiar, knowable conditions of samsaric existence, "there is a direct experience of the absolute truth or dharmata, the nature of things" (1997, 99). The ultimate or absolute truth, in other words, mediates the passage between relative truths.

More than merely a link between samsaric realms, however, *nirvāna* is not other than *saṃsāra*. The difference between them is, like the light passing through Ibn al-'Arabī's prism, merely perspectival. The *Bardo Thötröl* is explicit on this point, emphasising the importance of recognising both peaceful and wrathful or terrifying apparitions as projections of one's own mind, a feat only possible attendant on diligent spiritual practice during the foregoing lifetime. A practitioner's consciousness will experience the apparitions of the bardo quite differently from that of a non-practitioner. For the former, these will be evident as one's own mental projections, while the identical apparitions will appear to the latter as external seductions or threats. The respective perspectives will function according to the ways they have been conditioned during the lifetime of the deceased.

"Perception is a two-way process of communication", Fremantle elucidates.

> From an ordinary point of view, it provides a link between subject and object, connecting the observer with the external world. But from an absolute viewpoint in which there has never been any division between self and other, perception separates them and emphasizes the gap between them. (Fremantle 2001, 100)

Thus, after death the accomplished practitioner will recognise the inseparability of the bardo's apparitions from her own mental reality. A consciousness that remains convinced of relative appearances will perceive those appearances as separate from itself, for relative truth is by definition separative. Here, Burckhardt's description of the *barzakh* applies as credibly to the bardo, in presenting "separation only in that it is itself the starting point of a separative perspective, in the eyes of which it appears to be a limit" (1979, 2).

The same logic is expressed by the venerable Tsong-ka-pa, founder of the scholastically inclined Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.[233] According to Tsong-ka-pa, "conventional phenomena are truths only for the perspective of an ignorant consciousness that conceals reality" (Newland 1992, 3). As Lauf notes, "[b]ardo unites two states, as a continuity of forms of existence, which only our discriminating consciousness tends to separate" (1989, 34–5). In this sense, both *barzakh* and bardo serve as lenses through which the absolute and relative realms are at the same time identical and distinct.

I have not found any traditional assertion of a bardo specifically separating/uniting Buddhism's two truths. Yet the bardo, like the *barzakh*, serves to separate the phenomena on either side of it while simultaneously bridging them (Fremantle 2001, 54). Lauf expresses a similar insight in noting that "the intermediate state binds together both ends of past and future" (1989, 35). The bardo, then, appears to share the attribute of simultaneous separation and joining with the *barzakh* that lies between Ibn al-'Arabī's absolute and relative realms. I argue, therefore, that the bardo can justifiably be understood to serve a similar twofold function with respect to the absolute and relative realms posited by Tibetan Buddhism. This argument is further strengthened by the implied conflation of *saṃsāra* with the relative and *nirvāna* with the ultimate. Since the bardo is explicitly invoked as separating/uniting *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna*, it follows that it also separates/unites the two truths: relative and absolute or ultimate.

This paradox is expressed in Tsong-ka-pa's assertion that the relative and ultimate truths are both "mutually exclusive" and "a single entity" (Newland 1992, 3). Making the same point in theistic language, a Sufi text proclaims that "you are not God/but are not other than he" (Al-Burhānpūrī 1965, 73). While neither instance explicitly cites the bardo or *barzakh*, both reflect the characteristic refusal of the liminal to privilege either side of a perceived logical contradiction. And the liminal is, again, the nature of both bardo and *barzakh*.

The fusion of ultimate and conventional views is evident in Trungpa's depiction of

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[233] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "Dge Lugs (Geluk)".

the bardos. Each one is a "peak experience" in which it is unclear whether one has broken through to some form of enlightened realisation or is merely insane (1992, 76). For the Sufi, the distinction between sanity and insanity at the height of intense spiritual experience is likewise obscure: "The highest point of intoxication becomes, dialectically, the point of most lucid and sober wakefulness" (Sells 1996, 126).

This paradoxical inversion is not a mere doctrinal sideline. Trungpa submits that "this very faint line between sanity and insanity" actually comprises an important teaching, regarding not only the bardo but also the larger Buddhist canon (1992, 76). For, as Lauf explains, "[s]amsara, the world of changes, and nirvana, the condition of highest liberation and salvation from the perishable, are two inseparable poles of Being" (1989, 34). Interestingly, Burckhardt quotes a fourteenth-century Sufi mystic, Muhammad Tadilī of Djadīdah, as describing the *barzakh* as "nothing other than the pole that governs this realm and gives it its growth" (1979, 2).

The idea of a pole as a liminal indicator is not confined to the two traditions treated in this study. Drawing on broader mystical scholarship, Scott cites Frithjof Schuon as designating Essence and Substance—synonyms for absolute and relative—as "the poles of Existence: the ontological poles of the *Axis Mundi*". Again, these poles exist only in "their essential complementarity or biunity" (2007, 6–7; emphasis original). While a pole can serve as a force that grounds the eternal movement of the cosmos and everything in it (4), it can also represent a binary extreme, as in the expression "poles apart". That being the case, the poles of "subject" and "object" might function as dualistic enforcers or as prismatic conciliators—or perhaps, at one and the same time, as both. The same would then be true of any binary pair, including the poles of good and evil. As the Persian mystic Ahmad al-Ghazālī proclaims, "Who does not learn *tauhid*[234] from Satan, is an infidel" (Schimmel 1975, 195).

Lest we imagine that the bardo as liminal space implies only the coexistence of inseparability and mutual exclusivity, it should be understood that both *barzakh* and bardo traverse much vaster realms of paradox. In the case of the *barzakh*, for example, Burckhardt's metaphor of the necessary blind spot in the physical eye

[234] God's indivisible unity, a fundamental doctrinal principle of Islam. Also transliterated as *tawhīd*.

invokes the futility of logical deduction through apparent certainties (1979, 2). It may be that Lauf is attempting to express a similar futility in the Tibetan Buddhist idiom when he notes that "the other-worldly state of the inexplicable is a bardo" (1989, 45).

Thus it is that the notions of both *barzakh* and bardo profoundly trouble the compulsive tendency to categorise experiences as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Both the "lightning flashing" of the Sufi *waqt* and the "brilliant spark or flash" of the fourth moment accommodate the full range of human experience, from agony to ecstasy. Moreover, the hardship associated with any given state by no means diminishes the spiritual potency of the moment. On the contrary, the practitioner considers such difficulties grist for the mill, for "[w]ithout ego you cannot attain enlightenment" (Trungpa 1992, 156). Binaries such as pleasant/painful and accept/reject fall away in the light of liminality, whether manifesting as bardo or *barzakh*.

The Self

Both Tibetan Buddhist and Sufi traditions point to the annihilation of the conventionally experienced self as the path to the discovery of ultimate authenticity. The *Bardo Thötröl* presents each bardo as an opportunity to realise the "dissolution of the sense of self in the light of reality" (Fremantle and Trungpa 1975, xxii). For Sufis, the goal is "the passing away (*fanā*) of the ego-self in mystical union" (Sells 1994, 68). In both cases, exposure to absolute (in Sufi terms, "divine") reality dissolves the seeker's identification with the illusory self.

Yet paradoxically, this self is the subject—the actual condition—of the perceptual function, without which spiritual practice would be impossible. Here again, the interdependent action of the two truths is in evidence. As historian William Pietz notes, in Buddhism "[p]ersons do truly exist as real entities subject to moral (karmic) accountability, but only in this sphere, not that of ultimate reality … In reality, the self never did, does not, and never will exist" (2005, 197).

What is it, then, that experiences either the *waqt* or the fourth moment? Following the earlier descriptions of the experiencing subject as simultaneously inhabiting and

being these phenomena, I argue that it is an ontological presence, a mode of being unconditioned by known existential markers.[235] Such presence cannot be willed or contrived: it manifests as the ripening of diligent spiritual practice. In this presence, mutually exclusive binaries give way to the inclusivity of paradox. The dualistic basis for Us-versus-Them falls away.

Accordingly, I argue that the mode of being or presence of the *waqt*/fourth moment holds the potential for a profound reconsideration of the basis for religious violence. The fact that it is common to the *barzakh* and the bardo is not incidental, for by virtue of its manifestation in two established spiritual traditions separated by temporal, cultural, and geographical expanses, it indicates an authentic basis in actual experience.[236] This suggests that while perpetrators of religious violence may consider themselves fiercely committed to their respective traditions, they may be overlooking an important and authoritatively documented aspect of religious principle. The teachings on the bardo and *barzakh* invite a spiritual engagement far more profound than that possible through dualistic ratiocination or physical violence. Such engagement requires a level of existential courage exceeding the doomed attempt to eliminate the Other. The following chapter will explore the invitation to spiritual warriorship implicit in the bardo and *barzakh*.

Conclusion

The bardo, like the *barzakh*, is an imaginary that exemplifies a chaotic and uncontrollable experience. As a liminal passage, it entails the death of previous certainties, the unavoidable imperative of transformation, and the emergence of a new reality that can be neither perceived nor understood from the perspective of the

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[235] I am grateful to my academic supervisor, Associate Professor Sa'diyya Shaikh, for the insight that presence, while a variety of experience, is not synonymous with it. According to a revered Vajrayana Buddhist text, however, "immediate presence" is synonymous with "primal" or "intrinsic awareness" (Reynolds 2000, 52).

[236] Although Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism are separated by both geography and historical eras, certain coincidences do invite speculation. The composition of the Qur'ān predates Padmasambhava's presumed lifetime by a mere century, while Karma Lingpa was born less than a hundred years after the death of Ibn al-'Arabī. It is not beyond the realm of possibility, therefore, that Islamic understandings may have exerted some influence on Tibetan Buddhism. For a scholarly analysis of mutual influences in Sufism and Buddhism, see Alexander Berzin, "The Relation between Buddhism and Sufism", accessed September 9, 2019, http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/buddhism-islam/the-relation-between-buddhism-and-sufism.

consciousness that enters it. All of this makes the prospect of entering the bardo unappealing, at best. At worst, it is terrifying.

And yet it may be that the bardo, like the *barzakh*, precisely represents a remedy for the chaos and ungovernability of lived experience. The examples of tribal ritual studied by van Gennep and Turner demonstrate that such inevitable and recursive passages can be channelled and directed to serve the interests of both the individuals involved and their communities.

Szakolczai notes that liminal ritual must be clearly and predictably scripted in order to fufill this function, and it must be overseen by a figure who holds unconditional authority for the duration of the passage (2015, 18). I submit that the bardo's embeddedness in religious tradition and the *Bardo Thötröl's* detailed descriptions of what the practitioner should expect during that passage meet the first of these criteria.

As for supervision by an unquestioned authority figure, I point to the mandatory submission to a qualified teacher, or guru, implicit in the Vajrayana tradition.[237] Any practitioner whose allegiance to that tradition leads her to expect a passage through the bardo will have made a vow expressing unwavering devotion to such a spiritual supervisor (Lief 2013, xlii). Thus, the bardo tradition fulfills Szakolczai's criteria for a liminal passage so structured as to support positive transformation. I argue that this offers an instructive alternative to religious fixation in the face of inevitable and uncontrollable change.

A similar argument may be made for the *barzakh*. In this case, although the practitioner's shaykh may meet the requirement for a qualified "master of ceremonies" (Szakolczai 2015, 18), Sufis have recourse to an even higher authority: the divine Presence. The ritual script may not be as clearly established as it is with the bardo, for although the Qur'ān offers detailed descriptions of the destinations awaiting the pious and the sinner, it lacks substantive or detailed accounts of the passage in between death and judgement. Yet the texts of Ibn al-'Arabī devote

[237] *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. "lama".

tremendous time and attention to his explanations of the *barzakh*, and these constitute as precise a set of guidelines as is possible in the context of the ineffable.

The *barzakh* is also, as we have seen, the very condition of humanity relative to the Divine, and Sufis have recourse to an abundance of scripts to guide this passage. Not least among these is the Qur'ān itself. Finally, the *barzakh* is not a location, but a function of reality. In the guise of the *waqt*, it is in fact an ontological disposition. As such, it may be argued that it neither requires nor lends itself to scripting. Thus the *barzakh* tradition, like that of the bardo, fulfills Szakolczai's conditions for successful transformation through liminal rites of passage.

Both the fourth moment of the bardo and the *waqt* of the *barzakh* manifest the paradoxical—and thus inclusive—nature of the liminal. Where binary thinking entails mutually exclusive opposites such as good/evil and sacred/profane, thinking in terms of the bardo and *barzakh* worldviews accommodates the full spectrum of attributes and experiences. Both do so by abandoning the familiar limits of three-dimensional relativity in favour of a direct, immediate, and fearless presence. I argue that this presence offers the religious adherent a compelling alternative to the conceptual exclusivism central to violent defences of faith. It may be the case that this imaginary in fact reflects a kind of spiritual genius in turning to face the reality of liminality with religiously sanctioned protections that are specifically designed to enhance its transformative potential.

The following chapter will explore overlaps and contrasts between the *barzakh* and the bardo, specifically in the context of their shared liminal attributes. It will further introduce the notion of existential courage as essential to both passages and argue for the application of precisely this kind of courage to the scholarship on religious violence.

Chapter Six: Integrations and Resonances

Stay with the contradiction. If you stay, you will see that there is always something more than two opposing truths. The whole truth always includes a third part, which is the reconciliation.
—Jacob Needleman, *I Am not I*

Whether or not religion is a proximate cause of violence, it is widely implicated in contemporary global conflict. Thus, the relationship between religion and violence bears close examination, and I propose that the scholarship on liminality offers a novel and useful analytical tool for exploring that relationship. In my view, the inclusion of explicitly liminal passages in at least two established global religions suggests that analyses informed by liminality may open potentially generative avenues of exploration into the relationship between religion and violence. This chapter will examine this potential as represented by the *barzakh* in Sufi Islam and the bardo in Tibetan Buddhism.

Dualism

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that dualistic modes of thinking and being fluently lend themselves to violent articulations. Dualism's centrality in this dynamic reflects its exclusionary nature, since such formulations typically demand that one side of a binary pair must necessarily cancel out the other. Narratives of this kind suggest that goodness is the absence of evil, and vice versa. Further, binary attributes are relational; we understand goodness only in contrast to evil. Such binaries, when viewed categorically, mean that when any one group claims privileged access to goodness, other groups must necessarily be associated with evil.

As in the case of good and evil, conventional dualistic understanding does not generally accommodate simultaneous incidences of purity and impurity, or of sanity and madness. These sets of opposites are further imbued with hierarchical value: goodness trumps evil; purity is prized over impurity; sanity is preferable to madness. As has been argued, imputations of superiority and inferiority are inherent in the very nature of dualistic distinctions (Plumwood 1993, 42).

Both of these hallmarks of dualism—mutual exclusivity and hierarchical ranking—

have been linked to the formation and maintenance of collective identity. Any group necessarily defines itself in contradistinction to other groups: a German is not an Italian, nor is an Anglican a Presbyterian. Us exists, precisely, as other-than-Them. Since hierarchy is innate to the binary construction, Us and Them must be ranked. One will naturally want to perceive one's own group as superior.

This implication may not necessarily apply to all identities, as is evident in those cases where a given group may internalise a decidedly inferior projection (Spellmeyer 2018). Yet, as Weber has noted, the assumption of a distinct religious identity typically implies "superiority in propaganda"—i.e., in doctrine (1968, I:460). In such cases, the "out-group" will just as naturally claim the high ground for itself. Thus, an oppositional dynamic enters the configuration: Us versus Them.

Regina M. Schwartz offers a neat summary of this dynamic: "Violence is the very construction of the Other … acts of identity formation are themselves acts of violence" (1997, 5). The very designation of self and other—the fundamental dualistic stance—can significantly inform and enable acts of violent exclusion.[238] From this perspective, violence is the logical concomitant of a dualistic worldview. Further, it precedes doctrinal, ethnic, or ideological conflicts. Religious violence, as viewed through this lens, is not the product of quarrels regarding scriptural exegesis, ritual performance, or interpretations of tradition. It is built into the assumption that the world runs on mutually exclusive binaries.

If violence is indeed the inevitable outgrowth of identity formation, as Schwartz argues, then violence must logically be as fundamental to human nature as is the construction of both personal and group identities. From this perspective, the idea of mitigating violent conflict, religious or otherwise, might be considered doomed in its very conception. As I have argued, however, both the *barzakh* and the bardo reveal challenges to binary thinking in the very heart of religious orthodoxy. Hence, I take the position that dualism is not, in fact, constitutionally inherent in human

[238] This assertion may apply more to group or collective identity than to personal identity, which is arguably more accommodating of the African principle of *ubuntu*—"I am because you are" (https://walkoutwalkon.net/south-africa/ubuntu-i-am-because-you-are/).

understanding; and further, that the teachings of the *barzakh* and the bardo suggest the potential for a naturally non-dual worldview at the core of our experience.

The view that religious violence springs from a dualistic worldview, rather than from doctrinal or historical disagreements, revises the assumed relationship between aggression and violence. Conventional logic proposes a linear progression from an aggressive stance to violent acting-out (see, e.g., Galtung 1964, 98–9). If this is so, it makes sense to focus remedial efforts on the aggression assumed to precede violence. But if violence is inherent in dualism, then dualism occurs prior to aggression. In other words, dualism underlies the self-and-other construction that establishes the subject and object of aggressive action. This argument supports Galtung's understanding of violence as implicit in social and cultural structures, as explored in Chapter Two of this study. It may also help explain why attempts to mitigate aggression have, for the most part, failed to solve the problem of violence (see, e.g., Hassner and Aran 2013, 82 and Carrasco 2013, 223–4).

Dualism and Religion

Jan Assmann argues that "traditional religion … rests on the distinction between the pure and the impure" (2010, 60).[239] Psychotherapist James W. Jones, in similar vein, explains that notions of purity versus impurity are often implicated in religious terrorism (2008, 132). As another psychologically informed scholar of religious violence has pointed out, "the genocidal impulse is grounded in perverse forms of idealism and deep yearnings for spiritual purity" (Strozier 1994, 253). Shoko Asahara, the founder of the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult, is but one example of a violent extremist driven by the compulsion to "purify" the world (Lifton 2003, 63). While the co-optation of purity and the projection of impurity is not the only ideological basis for religious violence, it seems to at least empower an explicitly

[239] By "traditional religion", Assmann means pre-Abrahamic traditions. As noted earlier, however, he points out that early Christianity arrogated the attribute of purity to itself, designating other traditions as implicitly impure. Here, I cite Assmann in this regard to demonstrate an overall theological emphasis on purity versus impurity (see, e.g., Douglas 1966, 5–7 and Appleby and Marty 2002, 16).

Us-versus-Them stance. When the pure and the impure are couched in binary terms, religious actors tend to identify themselves with purity. In such cases the ostensibly impure Them may embody a material insult, if not an outright existential threat, to that purity. Religious extremists who hold this view tend to believe that impurity must be eliminated in order for purity to flourish (Jones 2008, 140). The co-optation of purity in the service of a religious group identity may thus lead to the violent exclusion of those perceived as impure.[240]

Assmann argues that monotheistic religions, in rejecting all but a single deity, are necessarily exclusionary (2010, 21; see also Schwartz 1997, xi). Whether or not one accepts that the exclusion of deities extends to the exclusion of other human beings, however, it is not uncommon for adherents of various global religious traditions—monotheistic and otherwise—to interpret their own doctrinal understandings in ways that exclude non-adherents (Kimball 2008, 7). Religious actors may accordingly reject the truth-claims of others, which Assmann argues imbues their very raison d'être with an "antagonistic energy" (2010, 3–4)—that is, violent ideation. Scholar of comparative religion Charles Kimball notes that although narrow, exclusivist interpretations do not always erupt in violence, they do "lead more easily" in that direction (2008, 35).

From this perspective, the practice of exclusion may in fact preempt its object; that is, it may well be the case that the designation of Them, the purportedly inferior Other, may arise only after, and in dependence on, the adoption of an exclusivist stance. It may then be inferred that establishing an Us-and-Them binary compels the designation of an out-group, or Other. If so, exclusion—whether of deities or rival religionists—might be something of a foregone conclusion.

This dynamic follows Schwartz's argument that negation and exclusion are expressions of a more fundamental violence inherent in the very construction of the Other (1997, 5). My own view coincides with this approach: namely, that the presumption of the subject-object duality underlying the construction of the Other lays the groundwork for an antagonistic division of humanity into Us and Them. Following this logic, the violence implicit in that division informs the subsequent eruption of explicitly violent acts.

[240] For similar observations in the context of religious violence, see, for example, Jamel Velji, "Apocalyptic Religion and Violence", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, 253; and Jones 2008, 151.

Yet dualistic thinking is deeply embedded in the way we understand our world. Although some religious conventions—as found within Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism—suggest that a dualistic worldview may be transcended, that accomplishment requires lifelong commitment and diligence. Such advanced levels of spiritual practice are typically limited to a small elite. The question then arises of how the identification of dualism as central to violence can be helpful in dealing with a worldwide pandemic of violence permeated with religious motifs and triggers.

Positioning dualism versus non-dualism, with the latter trumping the former, is hardly a workable solution. To blame a dualistic worldview for our troubles is, as mentioned earlier, simply to fall back into the dualistic trap. Happily, certain religious traditions offer frameworks of praxis that avoid deepening the perspectival chasm between duality and non-duality. I argue that these frameworks present themselves vividly and usefully in the form of the Sufi *barzakh* and the Tibetan Buddhist bardo.

Liminality

Liminality is an experiential phenomenon. The transformation it invokes is an ontological rather than a conceptual or intellectual event. Accordingly, the subject undergoing the *barzakh* or the bardo experiences a shift in her mode of being—a shift over which she has little control. Because the liminal dynamics of both bardo and *barzakh* pervade everyday life, the uncomfortable experience of undergoing an uncontrollable existential adjustment will naturally keep asserting itself.

As shown in Chapter Three, cycles of liminal disruption are unavoidable, natural, and necessary to human society. Whether they come as explosions of repressed societal evolution (as in autonomic liminality) or simply as part of the cycle of human dynamics (as with reactive projection), such disruptions generate painful experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, and chaos. In liminal phases, the formerly reliable ground of identity has become shaky, while the previously stable hierarchy is reversed. At such moments it is all too easy for the liminar to project the blame for her discomfort on an external force, and the excluded Other is an obvious target. From the perspective of the threatened Us, further demonisation of Them may seem to offer a path back to the old, reassuring status quo. If the Other appears to be the source of the trouble, it might even make sense to eliminate it completely.

Reflective Interiority

Perpetrators of violence, religious or otherwise, necessarily lack a particular kind of awareness—what the venerable Christian theologian Paul Tillich calls an "immediate awareness which gives certainty and an element of uncertainty" (1957, 16). Courage is required, he argues, to face the "existential doubt" (22) invoked by that uncertainty. Yet, as Jones reminds us, those religious actors most likely to inspire or commit acts of violence are least likely to entertain such doubt. To do so would be to put their very identity in question. Jones points specifically to a sense of "omnipotence and perfection" as most vulnerable to the awareness Tillich proposes. One's own human flaws must be strenuously denied, and the stronger the denial, the more powerful the projection on to the Other (2008, 134–5).

I use the term "reflective interiority" to name the awareness required to engage the ambiguous nature of human morality, and particularly the ambiguity in our own experience. I understand the term "critical self-reflexivity", as employed by scholar of religion and conflict Jason A. Springs, to describe the same phenomenon.[241] Both terms refer to a practice of non-judgemental engagement with the disorder of one's internal experience. Engagement of this sort entails profound risks to established identity, for it threatens the idealised self by revealing the inner demons that govern one's least praiseworthy aspirations and impulses. Yet this is precisely the purpose of turning to face the realities of one's own state of being: it has the potential to yield "diagnostic self-inventory and, ideally, self-correction" (2015, 148). To develop these skills is to loosen the grip of fear-driven reification and to reclaim responsibility for one's own discomfort, including that which arises from liminal events.

It is hardly a random coincidence that both the Sufi and Tibetan Buddhist approaches emphasise the importance of reflective interiority. "From the Sufi point of view", according to Seyyed Hossain Nasr, "only the person who has reached the center of

[241] I use the term "reflective", rather than "reflexive", in the interests of clarity. A reflex may be understood as an autonomic reaction to a stimulus, as when one's leg jerks in response to a tap on the knee. In Springs's usage, however, "reflexivity" refers to a thoughtful examination of one's interior reality. I am grateful to George Lakoff (2009, 9) for his distinction between reflectivity and reflexivity in this sense.

his or her being and knows who he or she really is can be considered fully human and be really someone" (2007, 23). Or, in a Vajrayana register: "To be real, we need to discover ourselves in *actual experience*" (Chögyam and Déchen 2003, 83; emphasis original). Reflective interiority, in other words, is a spiritual imperative in both practice traditions.

An Islamic hadith makes this imperative explicit in the proclamation that "[w]hoever knows himself, he knows his Lord" (Haddad 2009).[242] Among those Muslim scholars who have taken this maxim to heart is al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, whose name—meaning "one who takes account of himself"—reflects his commitment to *muḥāsaba*, or self-scrutiny (Renard 2005, 162). This practice entails continual evaluation of "even the most secret motions of the soul" in the interests of overcoming one's more base impulses (Schimmel 1975, 54). It has come to be associated specifically with the Sufi "science of hearts": the spiritual disciplines enjoined on the practitioner intent on mystical accomplishment (Renard 2005, 214). One Qur'anic scholar calls *muḥāsaba* "a 'practical' approach … within an 'orthodox' framework" (Picken 2005, 121), suggesting that a practice of reflective interiority is both active and theologically sanctioned.

The notion of turning one's attention to one's own experience is also central to Vajrayana Buddhism. Scholar and translator B. Alan Wallace emphasises the importance of exploring the arising and dissolution of mental events in order to "penetrate the nature of the observer" (2001, 131). A supplication to the Tibetan deity Mañjuśrī proclaims the excellence of "embodied deep awareness that is self-produced" (Berzin 2009, 4). Tibetan Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön maintains that self-reflection—"to really look at yourself honestly"—is essential to any progress on the spiritual path (*Lion's Roar* Staff 2017). Reflection is also central to the rites of liminal passage (Turner 1967, 105).[243]

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[242] According to Haddad (2009), this aphorism cannot be authoritatively attributed to the Prophet; nonetheless, he argues, it "conforms with the Qur'ān and Sunna".

[243] Turner refers to the requirement that ritual initiands reflect on their society, not necessarily on themselves as individuals. Nonetheless, I argue that his reference to the practice of reflection, whatever its object, demonstrates a significant connection between liminality and the spiritual practices described here.

According to Francesca Fremantle, the essence of Vajrayana practice is "to tame our own mind" (2001, 294), an exercise that requires diligent and fearless self-reflection. Accordingly, meditative techniques for taming the mind are central to Tibetan Buddhism (Hua 1974, 75). The same is true of Sufism (Nasr 2007, 115). In these practices, the gaze is turned inward rather than outward. The Other plays no role in this aspect of spiritual practice, except perhaps as a sort of mirror in which to glimpse one's own distorted projections.[244]

The mind having been tamed, Fremantle continues, "[t]hen we need to develop the energy, confidence, and courage of a warrior, to be willing to go beyond our limits and leap into the unknown" (2001, 294). In Sufism, the development of these qualities and the willingness to enter the unknown are reflected in the practice of chivalry, or *futūwa*. This is a form of internal warriorship, perhaps a species of the "greater *jihād*" the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have encouraged: namely, "that crucial spiritual battle against [one's] negative tendencies". Sufis call those who perform this battle *rijāl*, or people esteemed by God (Nasr 2007, 24). Ibn al-'Arabī refers to such practitioners as *mujahidūn*, "those who undertake battle", and defines them as "the people of effort, toil, and putting up with difficulties" (Chittick 1989, 211).[245]

To dignify those who use religious exegeses to justify violent action with the title of *mujahidūn* is, from this perspective, to overlook important issues of context and principle. The Prophet is said to have distinguished between the greater and lesser *jihād* precisely in the setting of warfare, welcoming his warriors back from the "lesser *jihād*" of the front to the "greater *jihād*" of "man's struggle in his soul" (Ahmed 2016, 318).[246] Further, committed Sufis have participated in violent anti-colonial movements (notably, in north Africa), demonstrating that the largely pacific theological basis of Sufi understanding does not necessarily preclude militancy in the

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[244] Neither Sufism nor Vajrayana encourages self-absorbed exclusion of others' concerns. As will shortly become clear, quite the opposite is true. However, the basic practice of meditation is specifically orientated toward self-examination, in the interests developing a foundation of sanity from which to enter into relationship with external phenomena.

[245] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* II 145.29. Here, Chittick translates *mujahidūn* as "'strugglers' … that is, those who carry out the *jihād*, the struggle against their own limitations". He attributes this translation to the Qur'ān; however, the closest reference I have been able to find—and this according to only a single translator—occurs in Qur'ān 9:60 in the sense of "those fighting in the holy wars" (Khan). This is itself the translator's interpretation of "Allāh's Cause" (Khan), "Allāh's Path" (Fakhry), or "an obligation [imposed] by Allāh" (Sahih International).

[246] Hadith scholars consider the authenticity of this anecdote questionable, though it is "famous on the tongues" (Ahmed 2016, 318). Such fame would suggest that the notion of the greater and lesser *jihād* strikes a powerful chord with Muslim practitioners, and is therefore worthy of consideration in the context presented here.

service of political emancipation (Muedini 2015, 134). The greater and lesser *jihāds* are not perforce mutually exclusive.

Nonetheless, returning to Ibn al-ʻArabī's *mujahidūn*, the brand of violence emerging from an Us-versus-Them mentality may be understood as precisely the avoidance of the effort and toil entailed in reflective interiority: a slashing of the Gordian knot, as contrasted with a commitment to explore its intricacies with a view to its gradual unravelling. The bold sword stroke that severed the knot may have served Alexander the Great, but the same tactic may prove counterproductive in the context of personal evolution. Were it possible to shift one's mode of being with a single stroke, we would live in a world very different from the one in which we find ourselves.

Accordingly, I argue that "man's struggle in his soul" necessitates "effort, toil, and putting up with difficulties" in a register not compatible with attempts to eliminate the vexing Other in defence of one's own truth-claims.

Inclusivity as Spiritual Practice

Both Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism regard meditation practice as foundation rather than fruition. Meditation practice cultivates intimacy with one's internal experience; however, such spiritual attainment as may be achieved in this manner is ultimately dedicated to the ennoblement of external relationships.

Sufi understanding, for example, specifically cautions against the exclusivity implicated in violence and embedded in religious or ideological fixation. This caution is evident in the description of the *fata*[247]—the practitioner who embodies *futūwa*—for this individual does not apprehend subject-object duality. From this perspective, "both 'self' and 'others' cease to exist" (Chodkiewicz 1983, 22). Duality then is overcome, resulting in the performance of "heroic generosity" (16). This stance relative to others clearly and unequivocally opposes the Us-versus-Them construction. It further reflects the realities of the *barzakh*, in that the practitioner is bereft of the stable reference points of binary convention. As a

[247] Literally, "a handsome, brave youth", but understood here as "the ideal, noble, or perfect man" whose generosity knows no limits: one who has realised *futūwa* (Al-Haveti 1983, 4).

liminal being, she is "neither here nor there … betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969, 95)—that is, the societal norms of good/bad, right/wrong and, by extension, self/other. Significantly, although *futūwa* may manifest as "a code of honorable conduct" (Al-Haveti 1983, 6), ultimately it is "a state of mind" (13). The Sufi masters who taught it aspired "not to formulate a universal doctrine, but rather to inform the heart" (Chodkiewicz 1983, 16).

This aspiration is in line with the three progressive levels of knowing pursued by Sufis from the formative period: knowledge acquired through information, knowledge acquired through experience, and finally, knowledge acquired through being—the latter esteemed as "true knowledge" (Al-Haveti 1983, 5). Nasr offers a similar construction in describing the three levels of attaining certainty of spiritual truth. Using the Qur'ānic narrative of Moses' encounter with the burning bush, he explains that Moses' compatriots attained the *lore* of certainty by hearing of this encounter from a reliable source (Moses, himself). The *eye* of certainty manifests through directly seeing the fire, and finally the *truth* of certainty is attained in being consumed by the fire (Nasr 2007, 30–1).

Buddhism's three *prajnas*, or wisdoms, follow a remarkably similar evolution. Here, the three levels are known as hearing, contemplating, and meditating. "Knowing through information" is roughly analogous to "hearing". Buddhist teacher Judith Lief conflates this *prajna* with "academic knowledge" of spiritual teachings (2002). In Chodkiewicz's view, this involves the formulation of "a universal doctrine"—a necessary step in cultivating a spiritual tradition, but as Chodkiewicz implies, not the practitioner's ultimate goal (1983, 16).

The second *prajna*, "contemplating", again resonates with Sufism's "knowledge through experience", in that it entails "really chewing … over" what one has acquired through information (Lief 2002). From contemplation of what has been heard, "the *prajna of experience* arises" (Ponlop 2008, 35; emphasis original). "Knowledge acquired through information" has progressed from the conceptual level to manifest as a felt sense of its meaning (38). As an experiential phenomenon, the liminal space of the *barzakh* or bardo might be said to support this level of

knowing or wisdom.

Finally, the third prajna, "meditating", refers to absorbing the teaching so that it becomes "part of who you are, down to your very bones and marrow" (Lief 2002). Here, the practitioner is able to "simply rest in the state of non-dual experience" (Ponlop 2008, 44). Once more, the parallel with the third level of the Sufi's "knowledge acquired through being", where one is "consumed by the fire", is inescapable. The transformational power of the liminal passage might further be understood as pointing to this third, and ultimate, transmutation of being itself.

The Tibetan Buddhist analogue of *fata* might be *pawo*, a Tibetan word whose literal translation is "one who is brave". Trungpa translates it as "warrior", by which he means "the tradition of human bravery, or the tradition of fearlessness" (1984, 28).

The word carries the implication of heroism (Chögyam and Déchen 2003, 288), but this heroism is not associated with triumph over external enemies. Aggression, according to this view, has no place in true warriorship for, perhaps counter-intuitively, fearlessness arises out of tenderness. "It comes from letting the world tickle your … raw and beautiful heart. … You are willing to share your heart with others" (Trungpa 1984, 46). The hero imagined in this sense is fearlessly vulnerable, and thus not compelled to seek the certainties associated with dogma or reified tradition.

Such a mode of being might well entail the "toil, effort, and putting up with difficulties" ascribed to Ibn al-'Arabī's *mujahidūn*. A legend of the Muslim hero 'Alī exemplifies the spiritual chivalry associated with such non-aggressive fearlessness. It seems that as 'Alī sat astride a vanquished enemy, the soldier spat in his face. Instead of killing the man, and much to the latter's surprise, 'Alī immediately leapt away from his foe. He explained that the spitting had angered him, and that to retaliate from that state of mind would debase his own warriorship. In Rūmi's retelling:

> Said he, "I wield the sword for the sake of the Truth,
> I am the servant of the Truth not the functionary of the body.
> I am the lion of the Truth, not the lion of passions,
> My action does witness bear to my religion". (Nasr 2007, 88)

Thus, even the purportedly "lesser" *jihād* of the battlefield enjoins on the practitioner a level of selflessness and detachment (Nasr 2007, 88). Such "heroic generosity" must almost certainly be the product of intensive and attentive reflection on one's own experience. To have been aware of his anger and to have been able to choose

Truth over "passions"—in the heat of battle, no less—required a bravery born of fearless self-examination. The legend of 'Alī's heroic restraint vividly affirms *futūwa* as a mode of being, beyond merely a practice or acquired skill. To sheathe one's sword in a moment of rage at one's helpless foe calls on a level of humanity far deeper than that accessible through the dutiful exercise of restraint in the name of a belief system. It is, above all, fundamentally inclusive, in that it draws its force from a larger context than is accessible through an Us-versus-Them construction. 'Alī's foe, though one of Them, is dignified as a person capable of triggering his enemy's passions.

At the heart of spiritual chivalry, in fact, is the clear understanding of one's essential equality with all others. So central is this virtue that for the truly brave, "[t]he idea of having primacy should not even cross their minds, and when it accidentally does, they should turn to God in repentance as if they committed a great sin" (Gülen 2012).[248] Accordingly, 'Alī permits the vanquished soldier's action to "tickle [his] … raw and beautiful heart"—and, having done so, takes full responsibility for his own angry response. Extrapolating to the present day, 'Alī's example suggests that it might be possible that "we can be heroic and kind at the same time" (Trungpa 1984, 28) in confronting our planetary problems.

'Alī's practice of spiritual chivalry here is a relational event, inclusive of all the parties involved. Not incidentally, the event is also classically liminal. The familiar hierarchy of victor and vanquished is undone; the certainty of 'Alī's triumph, in the form of his sword at his enemy's throat, falls away. The established rules of warfare have been inverted. The enemy, astonished at this exceptional behaviour, demands to know why he has not been killed (Nasr 2007, 87). The reversal of the expected protocols has thrown his worldview into chaos.

We are not told what happens next, but we might reasonably expect a transformation —if not in the enemy soldier, "an idol worshipper" (Nasr 2007, 87), then in 'Ali and/or his brothers-in-arms. Perhaps everyone present is jolted into a different mode of being. Certainly, the fact that Rūmi saw fit to immortalise this legend in verse

[248] Citing a Turkish text, *Fütüvvet Ruhunun Temsilcileri*, or *Representatives of the Spirit of Valor*. According to Google Translate, *fütüvvet* is equivalent to *futūwa*.

suggests that a profound spiritual event has taken place. Its profundity would appear to rely on ‘Alī’s willingness to practise reflective interiority and then to fearlessly embrace liminality. I argue that these two activities are in fact interdependent. To examine one’s internal reality is to risk upsetting one’s own convictions of identity and to replace certainty with ambiguity. To embark on a liminal passage is to invite just such upset, and to put oneself to the test. This interactivity of reflective interiority and liminality underscores my argument for consideration of both in the analysis of religious violence.

A Hermeneutic of Courage

Like *futūwa*, the nowness of the bardo is a mode of being. “[B]ravery is the courage to be”, Trungpa argues. It is “a connection with the elemental quality of existence”. In this bravery the warrior, like the *fata*, overcomes the duality underlying the construction of Us-versus-Them. The phenomena available to the physical senses, rather than remaining external and separate from the perceiver, “in some sense … become one with you” (Trungpa 1984, 109). In this, the warrior overcomes habits of accepting and rejecting, such that “his very being transcends duality on the spot, and thus he is said to have complete authentic presence” (176).

Zen Buddhist teacher Charlotte Joko Beck explains the correspondence between immediate presence and non-dual realisation: “When experiencing occurs, in that very moment, experiencing is not in space or time. It can’t be; for when it’s in space or time, we’ve made an object of it”. There is no subject in the moment of immediate presence—only “[e]xperiencing, experiencing, experiencing; change, change, change” (1993, 119). In the absence of both the experiencer and the experience, there is only nowness; and it is on this nowness that authenticity depends (Trungpa 1984, 96). The warrior of the fourth moment is released from linearity and duality into the unconditioned, liminal inclusivity of the bardo.

The central role of existential courage is of course not restricted to Buddhism and Sufism. Tillich invokes this quality in his analysis of Christian faith, concluding that courage is particularly essential in the context of uncertainty. For Tillich, faith entails both certainty and uncertainty; and “[t]o accept [uncertainty] is courage (1957, 16). Here, once more, the implication for liminality is evident, as uncertainty is a characteristic of liminal experience.

Perceiving the world from this mode of being, the warrior sees "how things display their harmony and their chaos at the same time" (Trungpa 1984, 104). Nowness embraces the paradox of non-binary experience. Its radical inclusivity transcends the impulse to either cling to harmony or reject (or, for that matter, cling to) chaos. This description brings to mind the *barzakh*, which, while not identical to the two phenomena flanking it—in this case, harmony and chaos—nonetheless "has in itself the power of each of them" (Morris 1995, 7).[249] Like the *barzakh*, then, the bardo of the fourth moment entails "the principle of non-otherness" (Burckhardt 1979, 1), which in turn precludes an Us-and-Them worldview.

The bardo, furthermore, is not other than everyday life. As Lopez observes, "the intermediate state encompasses all moments of existence, for we are always in between two states" (2011, 47; see also Mingyur 2019, 51). This is not a description of liminality as a permanent state, but rather as ubiquitous and recursive in the nature of ordinary reality. Embraced at this level, the bardo is experienced as unconditionally inclusive—and not only because, like the *barzakh*, it excludes no instance of experience. Both *barzakh* and bardo embody "the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both" (Turner 1967, 99). The bardo's essential inclusivity is further articulated in its manifestation as "wisdom beyond aggression" (Trungpa 1984, 103–4), for, as I have argued, aggression is dependent on exclusivity. Following this logic, the "wisdom beyond aggression" is necessarily inclusive in nature.

Trungpa goes on to define bravery as "not being afraid of yourself" (1984, 28). Here, again, reflective interiority appears central to spiritual evolution. In order to progress, whether in pursuit of *fanā* or Buddhist enlightenment, the practitioner cannot avoid attending to her internal experience. In so doing, she must confront the existential risk entailed in the death of her "ego-dreams", or ideal self-image (Smith 1993, vii).

This task is a daunting one, for it entails personal encounters with the very demons one's habitual reactivities are designed to override. As Sachiko Murata observes in the context of Islamic theology, turning inward "involves an increasing intensity of

[249] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* I 304.16.

ontological qualities". The reward for braving such intensity—"infinite and absolute Being" (1992, 237)—is unquestionably desirable, yet the cost is nothing less than *fanā*: "annihilation … of the human attributes". *Fanā* is accomplished through God's "majesty and severity" (304), rather than through His mercy (11), underlining the difficulty of the journey.

In the example of 'Alī, above, recourse to violence will have been an expression of existential cowardice. This variety of cowardice is not the same as that proclaimed by political leaders who condemn violent acts as "cowardly". I understand those assertions to reflect frustration at the perpetrators' flight from retribution into hiding or death. The existential cowardice I assert constitutes a rejection of religious aspiration itself: a denial of the yearning to fully realise one's spiritual potential. When 'Alī stayed his sword "for the sake of Truth", he might conventionally have been accused of lacking the courage to dispatch his foe.[250] Yet I argue that his decision to bear witness to his religion by refraining from violence required an even greater and more meaningful brand of courage: precisely the heroism or bravery described by such masters as al-Sulamī and Trungpa.

Context in Violence

Philosopher James Mensch makes a compelling point that bears directly on 'Alī's decision: any meaning that may inhere in violence depends on context. Wielded reactively—as, perhaps, might have been the case had 'Alī killed the enemy who spat at him—violence is meaningless. "As an instrument, we take [violence] as drawing its sense from the tasks on which we employ it", Mensch argues. "Outside of the context set by such tasks, it has no sense" (2013, 25). This argument transcends the binaries of violence and non-violence to make a more profound and nuanced point. To reify violence as unequivocally unacceptable is to replicate the very exclusion that drives the mindless, reactive violence born of an Us-versus-Them mindset. This mindset projects the evils of violence on Them, reserving for Us the righteousness of the non-violent.

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[250] The question of competing "Truths", though certainly relevant in the context of religious violence, does not figure into the current discussion.

It is not necessarily my argument that violence is sometimes justified, although this is almost certainly the case. The mother who kills the would-be murderer of her children is an example so obvious as to almost overstate the point. Historian Gerald Runkle suggests that we may avoid the trap of demonising violence by shifting the discussion to issues of justice and rights. Clarity on these values, he argues, will naturally generate non-violent defences in their service (1976, 368). Ultimately, however, Runkle resorts to calculations of relative harm to justify violence in certain defined circumstances (377). Although strategies of this kind may prove of practical use under particular conditions, my argument takes a different tack. I suggest that it may be possible to practise violence without concomitantly practising exclusion. ʻAlīʼs example, at any rate, implies that this might be achievable.

To separate violence from exclusion would require viewing violent activity through a lens free of binary attributes. I submit that narrowing one's understanding to a binary worldview virtually necessitates judgements of good/bad or right/wrong. This is precisely due to a lack of contextual consideration. If Phenomenon X is good, its potentially negative impacts on the surrounding conditions are disregarded or discounted; its good reputation will not be tarnished by inconvenient facts. If, on the other hand, Phenomenon X is bad, it may be blamed for any negative outcomes, regardless of its actual responsibility. As the identified problem, it must then logically be removed in order to improve the conditions in which it is embedded.

Examples of this dynamic abound in the current cultural environment. For "Phenomenon X", we may substitute recreational drug use, unionisation, celibacy for Roman Catholic priests, or mothers entering the workforce. Arguments for both sides of any of these issues, at least as manifest in popular media, often tend to narrow their focus to exclude contextual considerations.[251]

[251] See, for example, Pam Vogel, "5 of the Worst examples of Biased and Distorted Media Coverage of Education in 2015" (*Naked Capitalism*, December 31, 2015, https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2015/12/5-of-the-worst-examples-of-biased-and-distorted-media-coverage-of-education-in-2015.html); Stanford University Medical Center, "Studies of Scientific Bias Targeting the Right Problems, Study Finds" (*Phys.org,* March 20, 2017, https://phys.org/news/2017-03-scientific-bias-problems.html, 2017); and Lesley Evans Ogden, "Working Mothers Face a 'Wall' of Bias—But There Are Ways to Push Back" (*Science*, April 10, 2019, https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2019/04/working-mothers-face-wall-bias-there-are- ways-push-back).

Whether Phenomenon X is good or bad, the assumption of mutually exclusive binaries brackets existing conditions from analysis. In neither case is the contextual environment considered germane, which renders accurate and effective judgement impossible.[252] To exclude either side of the binary—good/right or bad/wrong—is to separate the phenomenon from the dialectic that shapes and is shaped by its presence. The practice of exclusion, whether of a binary value from its opposite or a phenomenon from its context, refers back to the dualistic worldview that first attributes binary values to phenomena such as violence and non-violence, and that posits value-based separations between phenomena.

As a liminal event, violence can further not be productively extracted from the larger context of its manifestation.[253] Violence reflects the fundamental nature of liminality, in that it is irrational, it upsets established structures, it threatens longstanding traditions, and it introduces deep uncertainties regarding the future (Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015, 2). As such, violence is dependent on the rationality, structures, traditions, and certainties it disrupts. Here again, the value of a relational and inclusive analysis makes itself apparent.

One might imagine an ideal world where violence would be unnecessary. But our world is far from ideal. As in the case of the mother protecting her children's lives, or perhaps of a population rejecting the structural violence of colonialism, imperialism, or apartheid, violence may prove to be the lesser of evils. Nonetheless, I argue that for a violent act to hold the potential for positive outcome, inclusive considerations of context must trump those of momentary passions or conceptual justifications. As Nasr has observed, even the "lesser *jihād*" of the battlefield "must be selfless, detached, and not caused by anger and hatred" (2007, 88). Both Sufism and Vajrayana Buddhism promote such action as heroic, precisely because it is free from attachment to personal valorisation. Trungpa gives a compelling example of this approach to violence:

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[252] A contemporary example of this logic may be inferred from Juan Gonzalez, *The Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America,* rev. ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 2011). Gonzalez documents the ways in which the United States's political and economic interference in Latin American and Caribbean countries is implicated in the current flood of immigrants across the U.S.'s southern border. Those who judge the would-be immigrants as bad and wrong (see, for instance, https://www.drjamesdobson.org/about/july-newsletter-2019) fail to recognise the contextual situation in which their own country has played a central role.

[253] The relationship between liminality and violence is underscored by the common practice of invoking deliberately violent means to effect the transformation of initiates during the liminal phase of rites of passage (Alcorta and Sosis 2013, 579).

> [I]f I happened to find myself in the central headquarters where they push the button that could blow up the planet, I would kill the person who was going to push the button for the bomb right away and without any hesitation. I would take delight in it! (Trungpa 1993, 88)

This, from an acknowledged master of Buddhism, a tradition whose foundational precept is to refrain from taking life (Humphreys 1997, 174). The point of this example seems to be that in certain specific contexts, violence may be the best course of action—and, significantly, that it is possible to enact violence without anger or hatred. By contrast, the perpetration of mindless, reactive violence—the kind ʿAlī rejected—is neither heroic nor brave. It reflects a preference for relative, binary values over the unconditional inclusivity of ultimate concerns. By "ultimate concerns", I mean a compelling interest in the nature of ultimate reality. Tillich's definition offers a slightly different nuance: "concern about what is experienced as ultimate" (1957, 9). In his view, any discussion of divinity is meaningless except when conducted "in the state of ultimate concern" (10). I read this as an assertion that a concern with ultimacy is essential to an authentic religious outlook.

In this light Tillich's further argument, that ultimate concerns transcend the bounds of duality, becomes particularly compelling. He points to "the disappearance of the ordinary subject-object scheme in the experience of the ultimate, the unconditional", further invoking the liminal nature of the ultimate in that it "is present beyond the cleavage of subject and object". Much like the *barzakh*, "[i]t is present as both and beyond both" (1957, 11). The holy, therefore, is essentially ambiguous, containing the potentials for both creation and destruction (15–16).

Significantly, in the context of the present study, Tillich argues that the inability to transcend dualistic understanding is characteristic of "idolatrous faith", in which finite and conditioned phenomena are elevated to the level of ultimacy. This version of faith has rejected the ambiguity of the holy, fixating instead on its rationality, truth, and goodness. Ironically, this fixation leaves the practitioner of "idolatrous faith" with only the "demonic" aspect of holiness (1957, 15–16). This dynamic may help explain the form of projection described earlier: the religious fundamentalist, faced with the negative aspect of the holy, projects it on to "a demonic enemy

… whose elimination is an ultimate goal" (Gopin 2000, 205). This process might be cited as an instance of reactive projection: the fixated religionist, having rejected the liminality entailed in authentic faith, blames the ensuing degeneration of spiritual experience on the demonic enemy and vows violent retribution.

The consequence of "idolatrous faith" is "existential disappointment" (Tillich 1957, 12), for "there is no finite way of reaching the infinite" (14). This argument accords closely with my own understanding of spiritual authenticity as entailing a mode of being that draws on a non-dual worldview, and that transcends fixation on a constructed identity. The term "existential disappointment" nicely encapsulates the distress that I have argued triggers violent reactivity on the part of those religious extremists whose commitment to static views precludes the ontological transformation enabled by liminal experience.

I argue, therefore, that what renders religious violence problematic is not so much its violence as its perpetrators' distorted understanding of religion. This is not a novel argument. Many scholars have pointed out the discrepancies between religious texts and those interpretations employed to justify violent acts.[254] However, it is not in textual hermeneutics that I locate the difficulty, for the dualistic nature of language makes scriptural interpretations inescapably susceptible to binary understandings.[255] Rather, I propose that the problem at the heart of religious violence consists in an abandonment of context and an insufficiency of existential courage. I argue, further, that a liminal analysis might serve to clarify and contextualise both of these predicaments. Recognising that liminal events are (a) deeply uncomfortable and (b) inevitable may help reframe the challenge they represent and, by extension, the options available in response.

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[254] See, for example, Gopin (2000) and Gerard F. Powers, "Religion and Peacebuilding" in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World,* ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers, 317–52 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[255] This point will be developed further in the following chapter.

Not incidentally, I submit that the same abandonment of context and insufficient courage are detectable in certain strains of the research on religious violence. It is hardly surprising that much scholarship is governed by conventional, dualistic understandings of violence, nor that a natural aversion to violent activity should inform research. These approaches reflect the cultural values and assumptions in which we think, move, and work. Yet a remark popularly attributed to Albert Einstein expresses the futility of attempting to find a solution from the standpoint of the same consciousness that created the problem.[256] It is apparent, in a word, that an either/or mindset that opposes violence to non-violence has thus far proven inadequate to the task of unraveling Us-versus-Them thinking. Approaching the issue of religious violence from the motivation to eliminate it must, I argue, limit the researcher's capacity to perceive the larger context in which it thrives. Again, I invoke the problem of Phenomenon X, fixation on which tends to draw attention to the trees at the expense of the forest.

As has been demonstrated in fields as diverse as quantum mechanics, anthropology, and sociology, the mere presence of an observer influences the behaviours of the elements intrinsic to the phenomenal world. It might then be reasonable to infer that the particular mindset or mood of the observer should further influence the nature of an observed event. To follow this argument is to permit at least some consideration of the potential for shifting our understanding of religious violence. Further, I argue that the application of a liminal analysis to religious violence may both support the loosening of dualistic conceptual constraints and open novel methodological possibilities in the examination and understanding of this vexing and thus far intractable phenomenon.

Conclusion

The profound uncertainty characteristic of liminal phases is unavoidable in the course of human experience. The temptation to seek solid ground in the face of these chaotic and ambiguous passages is intense. Ideological fixation, whether religious,

[256] "You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew." I have been unable to confirm the actual source of this statement. Whether or not Einstein actually originated it, however, its logic remains compelling and relevant.

political, philosophical, or academic, offers a seductive refuge from liminal vertigo. Yet the inescapability of change resists such denial. To cling to perceived certainties in the face of liminality is to flout the structure of reality, itself. And, as Charles Darwin has been credited with observing, those creatures that survive a changing environment are not necessarily the strongest or smartest, but the most adaptable.[257]

The bardo and the *barzakh*, even as they typify the anti-structure of their own liminal nature, paradoxically present themselves as structured forms. Both are well established and thoroughly consistent with the views of their respective religious systems. Although neither promises to quell anxiety through the stabilisation of chaos—indeed, ambiguity is their very essence—both the *barzakh* and the bardo bear the reassuring stamp of religious authority. The practitioner understands that entering into such a phase, although it will be difficult and possibly even frightening, is to embark on a recognised and traditionally endorsed crossing integral to her spiritual path. Furthermore, this liminal passage holds the promise of the transformation to which every spiritual seeker aspires.

The prerequisites for such a journey include a certain level of self-awareness. It is for this reason that Fremantle refers to the *Bardo Thötröl* as "a book of the living as well as a book of the dead". To prepare oneself for the bardos of dying and death, it is necessary to recognise the continual processes of living, dying, and being reborn that attend every moment of existence (2001, 7). Such recognition requires profound existential courage, for no sense of permanent identity can survive it.

Similarly, it is primarily in the *barāzikh* of everyday life that the Sufi can find God. As Ibn al-'Arabī proclaims, "His self-disclosure must take place within formal existence, which is that which accepts self-transmutation and continual change" (cited by Chittick 1998, 337).[258] Thus, the Divine is accessible in the very movement of a shifting reality, and nowhere else. To deny or resist change, from this perspective, is to deny or resist the presence of the sacred. The practitioner must be willing to abandon the perceived safety of an identity rooted in notions of changeless

[257] It seems that this observation was actually articulated by Leon C. Megginson in a presidential address delivered at the Southwestern Social Science Association convention in San Antonio, Texas on April 12, 1963. Megginson was, however, summarising Darwin's conclusions in the latter's masterwork, *The Origin of the Species* (accessed 12 June, 2019, https://quoteinvestigator.com /2014/05/04/ adapt).

[258] *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 516.14.

religious doctrine, history, or tradition. Spiritual practice at this level demands a willingness to examine one's own inner experience. When identification with external entities or values falls away, so do impediments to the practice of reflective interiority.

Perpetrators of violence do, of course, have inner lives. I argue, however, that their actions lack a certain kind of awareness with respect to the interiority described above. I base this argument on the fixation, common among violent actors, on truth-claims that deny the realities of change. Such fixation relieves its subject of the necessity for searching self-examination, for the denial of change extends to his personal and group identity. Since these identities typically manifest as ideals rather than as reflections of actual modes of being, it follows that unapproved and unwanted experiences must be repressed. Absent awareness of such painful challenges to an assumed ideal self, life becomes an endless struggle against the inevitable manifestations of repressed thoughts and impulses.

Whatever the dynamics that lead to liminal disruption, people who are blind to their own role in shaping the variety and intensity of its discomfort are likely to externalise responsibility. This projection is intimately connected to the maintenance of identity:

> [A]n unambiguous and undoubted identity is acquired by characterizing oneself over against an ... antagonist, a scapegoat, an enemy who is the mirror image of oneself, bearing all the characteristics that one fears the most in oneself and therefore attempts with all violence to suppress, preferably in the other. (Moyaert 2011, 56)[259]

This observation concisely describes the process whereby the Us-and-Them construction of the adversarial collective identity promotes projection of repressed experiences on to the Other. The anticipated elimination of the Other is then conflated with the elimination of the struggle. If Phenomenon X is the problem, its removal presents itself as a compelling solution; yet this strategy routinely proves

[259] Moyaert is quoting moral theologian Didier Pollefeyt, "Kwaad en verzoening: Een christelijk ethische analyse in het licht van Auschwitz", in *De mens en zijn wereld morgen: Lessen voor de eenentwintigste eeuw*, ed. B. Raymaekers and A. Van De Putte (Louvain: Universitaire Pers Louvain 1999), 109–33. This excerpt appears on pages 112–13. Moyaert's translator is Henry Jansen.

ineffective. Thus, perpetrators of exclusionary violence face the very real potential of dangerous and escalating conditions of permanent liminality.

The kind of awareness required to engage with one's inner reality must encompass all that we consider shameful and unacceptable along with all we celebrate and embrace. Such intimacy with the full range of one's own humanity necessarily enables identification with others, for we recognise in ourselves the same impulses and motivations that drive even those actions we most abhor. Repression of the undesirable aspects of our internal experience is not merely psychologically contra-indicated or ultimately ineffective: it can generate deadly consequences. When it erupts in the form of projection on to a select Other, such repression contributes to a toxic blend of fixated identity, religious fervour, and resource scarcity (both actual and perceived). This dissertation argues that what we call "religious violence" is, precisely, the product of these dynamics.

A strong corrective to this conundrum, as I have argued, is the spacious and non-judgemental awareness produced by the practice of reflective interiority. *Futūwa* and warriorship are exemplary among the spiritual praxes designed to cultivate such existential states. As has been demonstrated, these modes of being are intimately associated with the liminal spaces of the *barzakh* and bardo, respectively. Both approaches further recognise aggressive hatred as counterproductive, and both elevate concern for others above self-interest. Accordingly, an embrace of the liminal *barzakh* or bardo is incompatible with the Us-and-Them worldview. It follows that the decline of that worldview necessarily erodes the dualism that lies at the heart of violence.

Turning to face liminality may well promise benefits beyond even the mitigation of religious and other forms of violence. Uncertainty—such as the ambivalence and lack of firm ground experienced during liminal events—is associated with anxiety, fear of judgement, and the risk of loss (Fields 2011, 412). As religious teachers have observed, to resist such occurrences is to reject the possibilities of spiritual maturation (Chödrön 1991, 40; Nasr 2007, 120). A passage through uncertainty must, in fact, precede any meaningful human creation (Fields 2011, 430). Simply understanding the natural dynamics of liminality may support a first step away from reactive aversion in contexts other than that of religious violence.

As noted in Chapter Three, much scholarship has already been generated with respect to liminal analyses of international affairs, politics, history, education, race, and other fields of research. I suspect that the lens of liminality will shortly be applied in a great many other contexts. It is frankly difficult to name an academic discipline in which a liminal analysis could not offer the potential to extend current understandings.

Yet what I propose is not only the academic employment of liminality as an intellectual tool. I suggest, rather, that an actual embrace of liminal experience in the pursuit of academic understanding may punctuate the dread of uncertainty with curiosity about the loss of familiar reference points. My own experience of the liminal passage of writing a doctoral dissertation[260] has demonstrated that turning toward liminality in this way can generate alternatives to fearful repression, projection, and other comfort-orientated but ultimately destructive strategies.

[260] See Mary Jo Deegan and Michael R. Hill, "Doctoral Dissertations as Liminal Journeys of the Self: Betwixt and Between in Graduate Sociology Programs", *Teaching Sociology* 19, no.3 (1991): 322–32.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

> The evils we suffer cannot be eliminated by a violent attack in which one sector of humanity flies at another in destructive fury. Our evils are common and the solution can only be common. But we are not ready to undertake this common task because we are not ourselves. Consequently the first duty of every man is to return to his own "right mind" in order that society itself may be sane.
> —Thomas Merton, *Gandhi on Non-Violence*

This dissertation begins with a question: does "religious violence" exist? The term implies a particular brand of violence that is primarily motivated by allegiance to religious ideology. I have argued, in line with a number of prominent scholars in the field, that the term is a misnomer. Although religious concerns can certainly intensify the emotions and support the justifications associated with violence, I agree with William T. Cavanaugh, Jyrki Käkönen, Karen Armstrong, and others that religion is most often what R. Scott Appleby calls "a dependent variable": that is, where religion is implicated in violence, it is typically not causal.

Other scholars argue eloquently that religion is, in fact, a proximate cause of violence. These include Mark Juergensmeyer, Charles Selengut, and Jan Assmann. In Chapter Two, I make the case for my own view: that were it possible to extract the religion from religious violence, the violence in question would proceed on the basis of myriad other factors, including competition for resources, nationalism, and political ideology.

My argument proposes the defence of group identity as among the proximate causes of so-called religious violence. Martin E. Marty, having devoted substantial time and research to the issue of religious fundamentalism, concludes that the quest to secure individual and collective identity is central to that phenomenon. People's "search for self-identity", he writes,

> when it is challenged by change, may very well include recourse to religion, perhaps even as a starting and end point. In fact, religion may be the prime motivator, inspirer, and legitimator of their seeking and their acting. (Marty 1989, 7)

Although fundamentalist views need not necessarily lead to conflict, they are

frequently implicated in the forms of religious extremism that lead to violence, especially in clashes between two varieties of fundamentalism (Appleby and Marty 2002, 20). The search for identity, in other words, may be pervasive in religious violence.

Henry Munson, an anthropologist specialising in the study of religious extremism, lists Sikh and Hindu militancy in India and Protestant Unionism in Northern Ireland among examples of presumed religious violence that he attributes to issues of identity. In such cases, Munson argues that violence is explicitly not triggered by moral outrage at perceived violations of religious tenets. Rather, he writes, "[r]eligion serves as a distinctive marker of identity, and notably of national identity, even in the absence of belief" (2005, 340–1). In such cases, religious identity has been co-opted in the service of national interests, leaving the designation of "religious violence" in question. That said, nationalism shares much in common with religion, as described in Chapter Two.

Identity and Religious Violence

The human tendency to identify as or with a given ideology, religion, or collective is not in itself malign. Its dominant articulation in societal contexts, however, can lend the dynamics of identity a dangerous edge. Fixation on a given identity holds the potential for social disruption precisely due to the duality at its heart, for to identify with a group means to distinguish that group from others. Some scholars argue that violence is already implicit in this fundamental distinction.[261] The distinction is typically expressed in the form of certain ideological, ritual, historical, ethnic, and/or doctrinal reference points, which themselves become conflated with the group identity. Identification with these reference points divides the world between those who express the forms associated with one's own group and those who do not: in a word, Us and Them. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this worldview plays a particularly powerful role in religious allegiance.

When the reference points in question are held to be universal truths, the group may

[261] See, for example, Regina M. Schwartz and Val Plumwood, both cited earlier.

perceive itself as defending much more than just its own identity. The more tenacious its claim to an ultimate truth, the more such a group is likely to see its mission as crucial to the well-being of all humanity. According to environmental scholar Chris Park, the world's three most widely distributed religions—Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism—share an "ultimate goal … to convert all people on earth". Park's intention, here, is to underscore the very wide global distribution of these three "universal religions", perhaps softening this otherwise somewhat reductionist claim (2005, 440).[262] To the extent that even a minority of adherents of these religions take such an aspiration to heart, conflict would seem to be inevitable.

Truth and Its Opposite

Of all the registers of human activity, that of religion is among those most closely associated with universal truth-claims. Such claims add the conviction of a divine mandate to the already powerful compulsion to defend the group's identity. This combination of identity under threat and belief in a sanctified vocation may render religious groups prone to especially vigorous defence of their ideological positions.

The problematic dualism implicit in identity formation and maintenance extends to ideology, ritual, history, etc.—the reference points mentioned above. Each group holds its own version supreme and, by extension, others' versions inferior. In the case of the binaries of good and evil, purity and impurity, truth and falsehood, all but the most deliberately antinomian groups will naturally identify with the good, the pure, and the true.

Again, claims to a universal truth complicate the matter, particularly in cases where one's own group's characterisations of goodness, purity, and truth are considered superior in all cases, for all people. This logic describes the phenomenon of reification, by which one's own view is held to be uniquely exempt from change and relational dynamics, and therefore singularly appropriate for adoption by all (Wallace 2001, 138). The spectre of the liminal holds particular menace here, for the

[262] As a teacher trained in a prominent Western Buddhist tradition, I can attest that no such "ultimate goal" was ever communicated to me. In fact, I was explicitly coached to avoid evangelism in conveying the Buddhist teachings.

associated dissolution of reference points makes nonsense of any claim to an enduring truth (Szakolczai 2000, 187).

Those identified with opposing sides of mutually exclusive binaries will likely find coexistence difficult, if not impossible. When any group claims exclusive access to the good, the pure, and the true, all other groups—the Other—are more easily identified with evil, impurity, and falsehood. From there it is but a short step to the exercise of active exclusion, which acquires a particular urgency when competing truth-claims are perceived to threaten the basis of a group's very identity. When open conflict erupts, religious ideology and tradition are easily co-opted to justify violent action.

Accordingly, I argue that dualistic thinking is central to violence. Dualism is a necessary precondition for exclusion, which has itself been implicated in—if not outright conflated with—violence. Hence, I submit that religious violence arises out of a more complex and dynamic mix of factors than solely a clash of religious allegiances, and that the construction and maintenance of group identity may be central to this mix. Since the desire to identify with and belong to a collective is fundamentally human, the stakes are high. I argue that, in the aetiology of violence, perceived threats to such identification are antecedent to doctrinal or other religious quarrels.

Liminality

Liminality came to academic attention through the work of British anthropologist Victor Turner, whose inspiration was Arnold van Gennep's early-twentieth-century recognition of the tripartite structure of rites of passage. Although van Gennep developed this analysis in the context of east African tribal rites, he believed that such rites of passage are natural societal processes, and that the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation could apply to the spatial, temporal, and status shifts common to all human societies.

Turner was especially interested in the second of the three rites: the transitional, or "threshold" phase between two relatively stable states. He published a number of works during the mid-twentieth century that explored and expanded van Gennep's

original insight with respect to this liminal phase. Recent scholarship in a wide spectrum of academic disciplines has built on Turner's thinking to employ his understanding of the liminal passage. This dissertation seeks to contribute to this trend by proposing liminality as a useful analytical tool in the investigation of religious violence.

The liminal phase of transition is characterised by uncertainty, ambiguity, and a typically chaotic inversion of previously established norms and hierarchies. Hence, it invokes significant discomfort and is typically met with apprehension. The liminar's familiar reference points are no longer available, and there is no guarantee that others will arise to take their place. Should any such come into view, the subject has little, if any, control over what shape the new realities will take.

Liminality is inherent in the dynamics of identity construction over time. The recurrent flux characteristic of identity is attributable to the repeated liminal events that occur in the course of our life experiences (Szakolczai 2000, 188; Katz 2015, 123). For a group or individual committed to avoiding such ongoing disruption, ideological fixation can promise a seductive refuge. Fixation, however, directly opposes the natural processes of identity construction, leading to an endless struggle against inevitable change. The Us-and-Them configuration already implicated in group-identity formation provides a channel through which the struggle may be projected on to the Other, exacerbating antagonisms related to opposing theologies, practices, historical claims, and so forth.

The certainties sought in religious dogma may be derived from doctrine or tradition. Significantly, however, they often invoke the past, the only available dimension that appears stable. Relative to the shifting ground of the present and the unknowability of the future, the past represents solidity and reassurance, particularly when viewed through the lens of a desperate nostalgia. Nostalgia functions precisely to render the past static and ideal, in contrast to the untidy dynamism of actual, present experience. Ironically, nostalgia "evokes the past only to bury it alive" (Lasch 1991, 117). The past recalled as a changeless template for fashioning the future necessarily violates historical fact, abandoning the important lessons to be discovered in reflection on a dynamic, living past.

It is further in the nature of nostalgia to deny the influence of the past on subsequent developments. Nostalgics tend to enshrine narratives of the past in hermetic repositories, separated from their connection (and hence, also their accountability) to the present and future (Lasch 1991, 117). Yet because communities tend to create imaginaries based on known structures, such frozen narratives of the past often serve to shape expectations of future events (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995, 75–6n12). Rather than engage an open-ended analysis of a perpetually unfolding historical dialectic, fixated religionists may project a whole-cloth, static, and idealised past on to the screen of the future. The more idealised a group's purported history, the more reassuring its projections of a likely future. This may apply even to the apocalyptic projections that characterise many religious fundamentalisms, as the anticipated catastrophe is expected to annihilate the derided Other on a global scale, sparing the righteous to establish a new order unchallenged (Juergensmeyer 2006, 364). The biblical tale of Noah's survival through the great flood may be considered an example of an idealised past projected on to a future apocalypse that leads, through terror, to a new, pure beginning.

Those who wish to impose a romanticised past on the future may perceive their project as socially, culturally, politically, and/or religiously transformative. It has been argued, however, that passage through the disconcerting liminal phase is a necessary condition for the accomplishment of any real transformation, particularly—perhaps ironically— the kind of transformation often invoked as central to religious aspiration (Nasr 2005, 64; Sheikh 2012, 371). In addition, human beings need liminal passages in order to make meaning (Horvath, Wydra, and Thomassen 2015, 2), which is itself a central concern of religion (Johnson 2016, 3). Accordingly, I argue that the weight of evidence—in terms of both practical benefit and the inevitability of liminal events—endorses the wisdom of familiarising oneself with, and ultimately embracing, liminality.

Two Hypotheses

I have argued that the approach of a liminal phase will hold particular foreboding for a group invested in the reification of its reference points. To some extent, collective religious identity construction is dependent on a familiar binary worldview that

becomes less dependable on the unsteady ground of liminality. “Things fall apart”, as William Butler Yeats proclaims; “the centre cannot hold.” Perhaps prophetically, the poet goes on to lament that under these conditions, “the best lack all conviction, while the worst / are full of passionate intensity”.[263] I argue that such passionate intensity in the face of things falling apart is precisely what drives religious violence.

I offer two possible scenarios in which the lens of liminality may clarify the dynamics of religious violence. The first of these, reactive projection, describes a situation in which violence is a direct reaction to the discomfort of a liminal passage. Sensing with dread the approach of uncontrollable liminal chaos, fixated religionists blame their distress on the Other: the purportedly evil, impure, inauthentic Them, contrasted with the ostensibly good, pure, authentic Us. To eliminate Them, from this perspective, should bring an end to the discomfort attributed to their activities—or, more precisely, to their very existence.

The second hypothetical scenario, autonomic liminality, suggests that when religious actors oppose the natural manifestation of a liminal phase by fixating on perceived certainties, liminal events may erupt uncontainably in the form of violence. The more strenuous their attempts to repress the apprehension and vulnerability attendant on approaching upheaval, the more intense these difficulties may in fact become. As psychologists are well aware, repression “almost always breeds anxiety, fear, and even aggression” (Jones 2008, 169). Anxiety and fear are, as has been noted, common reactions to the groundlessness of liminality. Hence, autonomic liminality describes a situation in which the painful emotions attendant on liminal disruption have been repressed or projected in order to avoid or displace that disruption, and where this strategy has served instead to aggravate and compound both the disruption and the pain.

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[263] From “The Second Coming”, by William Butler Yeats (http://www.potw.org/archive/potw351.html, accessed July 31, 2019). “The Second Coming” might be understood as describing precisely the chaotic disruption of the liminal in the form of war.Yeats wrote the poem in the aftermath of World War I. Shortly before the Second World War broke out, he told a friend that the poem anticipated what was still to come. “His poem seems to suggest that world affairs and spirituality undergo transformation from time to time”, explains a literary analyst. “Humankind has to experience darkness before the light can stream in again through the cracks” (Andrew Spacey, “Summary and Analysis of the Poem ‘The Second Coming’ by William ButlerYeats”, March 5, 2019. https://owlcation.com/humanities/Summary-and-Analysis-of-Poem-The-Second-Coming-by-William-Butler-Yeats, accessed August 21, 2019.)

Reactive projection, then, employs a strategy of blame to resolve the painful emotions generated by liminal disruption. Autonomic liminality refers to an eruption of liminality despite, and in fact intensified by, this or other repressive strategies. Both these hypothetical analyses are grounded in the understanding of liminal events as not only inevitable but actually natural to human dynamics. This analysis does not propose that autonomic liminality and reactive projection are necessarily mutually exclusive. Reactive projection might in fact be considered an almost routine by-product of autonomic liminality; although theoretically, at least, the reverse might not obtain.

If liminality is indeed necessary to genuine transformation, it is particularly ironic that those who fixate on an unchanging view of their religious traditions, in denial of the reality of recursive liminal passages, reject and perhaps even disfigure the very transformation they seek. In this way, resistance to natural liminal cycles sets up conditions conducive to what has been called "permanent liminality", a situation in which liminal disruption fails to resolve into the third phase of van Gennep's tripartite rites: the relatively stable incorporative or aggregative phase.

The chances of liminal conditions becoming normalised in this way are multiplied when people attempt to impose artificial order on naturally occurring disorder, such as that associated with liminal events (Thomassen 2014, 229). Another irony, then: fixated religionists (or ideologues of any stripe), in their very attempts to deny or avoid liminality, run the risk of establishing it as an ongoing state. It could be argued that the continued and increasing global incidence of religious violence in itself reflects conditions of permanent liminality.

The hypotheses presented above—those of reactive projection and autonomic liminality—do not exhaust the possible applications of liminality as a lens through which to view the phenomenon of religious violence. I offer them as preliminary examples of the potential for analytical evolution in the academic study of this phenomenon.

Experience and Emotion

> As a conscious realist, I am postulating conscious experiences as ontological primitives, the most basic ingredients of the world. I'm claiming that experiences are the real coin of the realm. The experiences of everyday life—my real feeling of a headache, my real taste of chocolate—that really is the ultimate nature of reality.
> —Donald Hoffman, cognitive scientist, *Quanta Magazine*

Liminal passages are, by definition, experiential in nature. The relationship between liminality and experience is unequivocally asserted in the following:

> [A]n "experience" means that once previous certainties are removed and one enters a delicate, uncertain, malleable state, something might happen to one that alters the very core of one's being. (Szakolczai 2015, 18)

Direct experience is both stressful and transformative. Transformation is virtually guaranteed to invoke stress, precisely because "previous certainties are removed". To avoid this challenging passage is to drift into "indirect experience", which, for psychologist and Buddhist teacher Ngakpa Chögyam, is synonymous with duality (2003, 75).[264] Duality having been established as fundamental to violence, this abandonment of direct experience would, from this perspective, seem to be implicated in the dynamics of violent activity.

Experience itself defies fixation. From one moment to the next, we shift from pleasure to pain, joy to sorrow, loss to gain. The routine frustration of our attempts to cling to desirable experiences may be why both the Sufi and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions view liminality as intrinsic to human experience. Continual change sweeps us along from *barzakh* to *barzakh*, from bardo to bardo. This should help us recognise the futility of attempts to impose ideological fixities on the nature of reality. "You come to nature with your theories", notes nineteenth-century French

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[264] It may be that the *barzakh* separating and uniting direct and indirect experience—and hence also non-dual and dualistic modes of being—consists in the presence of thoughts. As Schleiermacher (1893, 37) observes, "[y]our thought can only embrace what is sundered". This insight underscores the cautions reported in previous chapters with respect to an unreflective, exclusive dependence on intellectual understanding in the embrace of spiritual realities.

artist Auguste Renoir, "and she knocks them all flat".[265] Such recognition further clarifies why neither the *barzakh* nor the bardo is accessible via intellectual striving. The conceptual reification of liminal passages opposes their very nature and function.

Early champions of academic religious studies such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto argue passionately for the primacy of experience in religion (Schleiermacher 1893, 40–1; Otto [1923] 1929, 61). More recently, Robert Bellah proposes that "traditional forms arise not from reason but from the immediacy of experience" (Cooper 2004).[266] The similarity between Bellah's "immediacy of experience" and Trungpa's "experience of nowness" is instantly apparent. These scholars suggest that the heart of religious understanding leans more heavily on experiential than on intellectual insight.

This is not to say that the intellectual foundations of religious doctrine have no value, nor to oppose doctrine to experience. Rather, authentic religious doctrine must stand on the ground of human experience. Liminality being native to the structure of human experience, it follows that authentic spirituality, infused as it is with experiential value, must likewise reflect the inevitability and influence of liminal events.

Although doctrine will likely include theoretical and mythic narrative, I argue that its moral impetus can be effective only to the extent that it engages the heart. At this level, the notion of certainty arises in a different register, as reflected in Nasr's description of the lore, eye, and truth of certainty, expounded in Chapter Six. As with the Buddhist equivalent of hearing, contemplating, and meditating, spiritual understanding progresses from the intellectual to the experiential, and it is in experience that certainty ripens. Thus the practitioner's internal experience is at least as central to authentic spiritual insight, if not more so, than is any external theological or historical text.

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[265] As quoted in *Masterpieces of Painting from the National Gallery of Art,* ed. H. Cairns (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1944), 168.

[266] Bellah credits this insight to Paul Ricoeur's "second naivete", an analytical approach that reinstates traditional exegesis as understood in the light of critical enquiry.

From this perspective, spiritual transformation occurs more at an ontological than at an intellectual level. It generates changes to the practitioner's mode of being. The shiftiness of experiential ground may in fact explain why religious tenets have historically undergone frequent re-interpretation. Even the Hebrew Bible's Ten Commandments, although literally carved in stone, specifically address the situation in which the Israelites found themselves at a particular juncture on their journey (Schwartz 1997, 36). For another example, many modern Jews consider the biblical dietary prohibitions of *kashrut* largely irrelevant now that the risk of food contamination that presumably informed these laws is no longer of pressing concern (Jewish Virtual Library 2019).

Whatever the historical and cultural conditions driving the content of religious doctrine, Boyer argues that many scriptural texts originated to protect the livelihoods of religious specialists. Beginning in the Middle East and eventually spreading across all of Eurasia, ancient guilds of these specialists apparently developed theologies to "brand" their respective versions of supernatural access. If so, then early religious doctrine in this part of the world might have arisen from market forces rather than, or along with, divine inspiration. Accordingly, Boyer asserts that doctrine is not the foundation of religious institutions but arises from each institution as an assertion of privileged identity (2001, 275). The Us-versus-Them construction is obviously native to this strategy, for a given religious specialist must distinguish himself from the pack of others also claiming unique access to spiritual truths.

Further, doctrine is shaped by cultural, political, and societal conditions at the time of its formulation. "[W]hat is at stake in the diffusion of religious concepts", Boyer submits, "is very much a matter of social interaction, of coalitions and politics, filtered through people's social mind concepts" (2001, 269). The importance of flexible interpretation is again apparent here, as all of these dynamics are themselves constantly in flux.

Boyer's argument does not challenge the potential malleability of religious doctrine; like any product, it can offer new and improved versions of itself. The continual revision of established spiritual traditions—as manifested in Christian Science, Jewish Renewal, the Muslim Reform Movement, and Engaged Buddhism, among

others—speaks to the compelling response of religious actors to changing historical, cultural, and societal conditions. Nor does Boyer's somewhat cynical account of doctrinal origins necessarily rule out the possibility that any given doctrine may contain genuinely useful and uplifting spiritual content. Despite Evans-Wentz's questionable claim to authentic Tibetan Buddhist transmission (Lopez 2011, 150), for example, his translation of the *Bardo Thötröl* has after all proven widely helpful to many sincere practitioners. As Buddhist lore reminds us, the impeccable white lotus draws its life from roots buried in dark sludge (Chögyam and Déchen 2003, 159). As this dissertation argues, rigid binary distinctions are of limited utility in exploring the dynamic nature of the phenomenal world. To designate any phenomenon as exclusively good or bad is to impose a two-dimensional view on a reality comprising at least four dimensions—and perhaps many more (Boyle 2006).

Thus, its origins notwithstanding, religious doctrine may contain profound spiritual guidance and support. Certainly, students of virtually every religious tradition count the study of its sacred texts as indispensable to their pursuit of genuine spiritual understanding. The crucial point, from a non-dual perspective, is to recognise the inseparability of doctrine and experience. As Buddhist teacher Traleg Kyabgon reminds us, "cognitive ability should be supported by the richness of our emotional repertoire" (2015, 77). From a different angle, we may draw on our intellectual capacities to integrate the understandings encoded in our experience. Either way, "there is no cognition without feeling and no meaning without emotion" (Melucci 1995, 45). As human beings, we are gifted with intellectual, emotional, and intuitive capacities. It behooves us to cultivate and engage all of these faculties, particularly in the context of religion, where realities beyond the limits of ordinary consciousness are invoked. Maintaining the optimal balance must surely be part of the task entailed in the spiritual challenge at any given juncture.

The Manipulation of Experience

Although experience defies reification, it is not impervious to manipulation. This is particularly true in the case of emotional experience—and emotion, as argued in Chapter Two, is intrinsically implicated in religious violence. Anger and disgust promote efforts to eliminate the evil, impure Other, while violent action itself may

generate feelings of ecstatic "deified self-intensification" (Giesen 2015a, 86). Both negative and positive emotions such as these can be powerfully motivating, a point surely not missed by ideologues seeking to recruit soldiers.

Here again, the centrality of identity to violence is evident. Indeed, aggressive anger "is a style of communication that sets out to establish unchanging personal identity as real" (Chögyam and Déchen 2003, 138). Negative emotions directed at the Other intensify the Us-versus-Them construction underlying group identification, while the exhilaration derived from violent activity appears to directly reinforce a sense of superior selfhood. Either way, the emotion—whether disgust, anger, or ecstasy—drives an internal narrative that intensifies the experience. Anyone who has experienced the intensification of such emotions understands how, barring other interventions, a compelling need arises to resolve the intensity by taking action.

This entire process is typically opaque to the perpetrator of violence. Jones remarks that "amnesia about what is really going on … blindness about the actual cause of violence" is essential to the dynamics of projection and aggression (2008, 151). Jones is referring specifically to the phenomenon of scapegoating, but I argue that his analysis extends to include most, if not all, forms of reactive projection. Further, Jones suggests that a proclamation of perceived certainties necessarily denies one's human limitations (169). The violent perpetrator is obliged to practise active ignorance of his own unending "living-dying". Thus, acts of violence depend on the suppression of self-awareness, and specifically on disassociation from one's own experience.

Presence, by contrast, requires acute self-awareness. As promoted by both Sufis and Vajrayana Buddhists, it entails a profound commitment to what I have called "reflective interiority". For the Sufi, this interiority consists in an encounter with "the truth of the oneness of Being", which "can be fully known only by being experienced spiritually" (Nasr 2007, 38). For the Buddhist, it is "to discover ourselves in *actual experience*" (Chögyam and Déchen 2003, 83; emphasis original). Such presence, as discussed earlier, is not a mere feat of mindfulness divorced from past and future concerns. It is a mode of being: an ontological reality born of genuine transformation.

Language

The inseparability of conceptual and experiential content notwithstanding, the two are distinct. The paradox implicit in their relationship is evident in the non-duality of experience, on the one hand, and the unavoidable dualism of language, on the other. As Tillich notes, the non-dual ultimate can only be spoken of "in a language which at the same time denies the possibility of speaking about it" (1957, 61). Language, in other words, lacks the dimensionality necessary to do justice to experience (cf. Prickett 2006, 87). And yet the two—language and experience—can hardly be separated. As the writer James Baldwin remarks, "it is experience which shapes a language; and it is language which controls an experience" (2010, 134). The relationship between the two invites consideration of a *barzakh.* Such a *barzakh* might perhaps consist in spiritual practice itself, in that the latter promotes a distinction between dualistic doctrine and non-dual experience while simultaneously expanding one's consciousness to accommodate both.

The fact remains that experience cannot be captured, immobilised, and transmitted. Conceptual mind must step in, which it does in the form of language. The power of language in the context of religion is evident in the very endurance of myriad scriptures, teachings, and commentaries. Recorded doctrine parts ways with the direct "experience of nowness", yet those who attain direct spiritual experience mostly do so with the help of the recorded accounts of those who have gone before them.

Seyyed Hossain Nasr eloquently explains the relationship between the articulable and the ineffable in human affairs:

> What good does it do to write about love? One has to experience love in order to understand what it is. … Nevertheless, although dealing with words and concepts, writing about love can awaken a certain awareness in the mind and soul of the reader, which in turn can cause him or her to become prepared to experience love on some level. But love itself cannot be reduced to its description no matter how lucid and poetic, while at the same time words that have come from those who have really loved can bring about recollection and awaken within some people the love that resides within the soul of all men and women. (Nasr 2007, 61)

Applying Nasr's argument to religious doctrine, on the one hand, and to the *waqt* or fourth moment, on the other, it would seem that a productive relationship may obtain between doctrine and liminality. Positive outcomes, however, depend on an attentive and respectful interaction. Elevating either at the expense of the other seems unlikely to lead to authentic spiritual insight.

Jones likens discursive analysis of the Divine to a Zen koan in that its purpose is "to drive the mind beyond itself and into the transcendental darkness that lights up the world" (2008, 189). At its best, such analysis consciously employs ratiocination in order to transcend ratiocination. Thus there is, as Nasr argues, a role for language—and for doctrine, in the religious context—in the pursuit of authentic spiritual attainment.

This raises the challenge of finding language that is suitably subtle and skillful. Ibn al-'Arabī is among those who endeavour to achieve a meaningful balance between language and experience. His struggle centres on the "meaning event"—the instant when non-reflective consciousness is transformed into reflective awareness, an event that erases dualistic distinctions (Sells 1994, 63). The dualism embedded in language makes it impossible to communicate the experience of the meaning event; yet to refrain from attempting to do so is to abandon other practitioners who aspire to attain it.

Ibn al-'Arabī employs the metaphor of a polished mirror, which is itself invisible except by means of whatever it is reflecting. The meaning event entails a shift in the practitioner's identity, as, in "a moment of immediacy", she relinquishes her sense of a separate self and enters into union with the Divine. The polished mirror of her awareness erases the separation between subject and object. Thus the meaning event may even transcend union, in that the distinction between self and other falls away as the practitioner experiences "oneness with the real". Now it is no longer possible to tell whose image appears in the mirror: God's, or the Sufi's (Sells 1994, 8–10). This "moment of immediacy" recalls the *waqt* or fourth moment, experiences that also explicitly eclipse the separations of dualism.

The same metaphor occurs in Tibetan Buddhism, where primordial awareness is described as a mirror. The mirror's capacity to reflect without bias whatever is

placed before it is referred to as "immediate presence" (Reynolds 2000, 5)—an echo of Trungpa's fourth moment as an "experience of nowness". Trungpa, in fact, locates that experience in a non-dual, unconditioned mode of being he calls "the cosmic mirror" (2004, 80). In both the Vajrayana and Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism, the mirror denotes pure awareness, specifically as it manifests in immediate experience.

Metaphor is frequently and richly engaged in both Sufism and Vajrayana. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Ibn al-'Arabī counts metaphor as one of the three Presences that describe reality. So crucial is this Presence to spiritual understanding that without it, the meanings emanating from the Divine are not available to humanity. Thus, as a *barzakh* bridging meaning and form, it is "the most perfect world" (Chittick 1998, 259).

Shaykh al-Akbar's mirror is just one of the metaphors Sufism shares with Vajrayana Buddhism. Another is the invocation of light, which Sufis use to describe the self-manifestation of the Divine (Renard 2005, 143).[267] In similar vein, the Vajrayana notion of buddha-nature has been called "the sun of human dignity", whose light pervades the entirety of our experience (Trungpa 2004, 44). Seeds, plants, clouds, and water are just some of the myriad metaphors found, not only in Sufism and Buddhism, but across the spectrum of religious literature.[268] The ubiquity of metaphor in this context reflects its unique utility in conveying the nature of experience.

The characteristically literal interpretations of doctrine by some religious extremists offer a stark contrast to this poetic language (Strozier 2007, 85). Nasr's elegant argument, above, suggests that such literalism—in addition to generating "bad science [and] bad theology" (Teehan 2010, 189)—does not serve the delicate relationship between language and experience. Failing to invoke the intimate, intricate, continually shifting essence of experience, the language of literalism tends to impose a one-size-fits-all worldview that excludes other possibilities. In the face

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[267] See also Chapter Four of this study, footnote 72.

[268] See, for example, Qur'ān 37:64; Matthew 13:1–23; Label Lam, "Torah-Like Water: Parshas Bamidbar", Torah.org, *Dvar Torah*, May 13, 2010, https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5770-bamidbar/, accessed July 12, 2019; and Jayaram V, "Symbolism of the Cloud, Lightning, and Thunder", Hinduwebsite.com, n.d., https://www.hinduwebsite.com/symbolism/symbols /cloud.asp, accessed July 12, 2019.

of such assumed certainty, the practitioner is invited to deny the wisdom of her own experience. Absent that wisdom, the heartless constructions of exclusionary logic work to obscure her commonality with all other experiencers—namely, the rest of humanity. From this angle of vision, the violence implicit in the Us-versus-Them worldview easily heaves into view.

Whether read as literal or appreciated as metaphorical, doctrine appears to receive significantly more attention in the study of religions than does experience. This is hardly surprising, given the centrality of language to academic activity. Experience is singular, fleeting, and unrepeatable, making it less accessible to analytical tools. As liminal phases, the *barzakh* and the bardo are categorically experiential in nature; thus, intellectual striving offers only limited access to both. Indeed, caution is needed to guard against attempts to reify these liminal passages.

Barzakh and Bardo

Religion is largely an experiential form of human engagement. As such, it is subject to the structural dynamics common to all experience, including inevitable liminal events. It seems thus quite natural that religious traditions across the planet have developed ways of thinking about and engaging with liminality. The Sufi *barzakh* and the Tibetan Buddhist bardo, in my view, represent two of the most well developed and sophisticated articulations of this engagement.

As exemplars of liminal passages, both the *barzakh* and the bardo demonstrate a robust capacity for religious lore to embrace the realities of disruption—and to seize on them as opportunities for transformation. The presentation of these two passages in this study suggests that practitioners of their respective religious systems consider them helpful to their spiritual development. In this, the *barzakh* and the bardo lend religious authority to the experience of liminality, providing a spiritually legitimate container for individual and collective life passages that may otherwise be regarded as essentially negative.

My comparison of the *barzakh* and the bardo has not yielded any meaningful distinctions between them in the context of this study. Obvious differences derive from their respective theistic and non-theistic roots: where the *barzakh* is intimately

implicated in the Sufi's relationship with the Divine, the bardo represents an opportunity for the Vajrayana practitioner to engage her relationship with her own mind. There are also stylistic divergences between the two. Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh*, for example, reflects a more minimalist Sufi aesthetic, while the bardo is replete with the ornate and elaborate symbolism typical of Tibetan Buddhism.

Beyond these relatively superficial differences, however, lie more significant similarities. Chapters Four and Five have documented many of these, among them the recognition of pervasive liminal activity in everyday life; the manifestation of such activity in immediate experience; and the non-duality implicit in both passages. Further, the bardo and the *barzakh* both reveal themselves as modes of being, as opposed to conceptual ideals. In this sense, they offer remarkably similar guidance to adherents of spiritual practices that are, as noted above, in some respects quite dissimilar. This suggests that liminality and the imperative to engage it may not be peculiar to any particular religious mindset but may rather represent recognitions of a more fundamental spiritual reality.

The Immediate Threshold

As noted in Chapter Four, a *barzakh* lies between any two adjacent entities—including, it must then be imagined, between the bardo and the *barzakh* as comparands. Since this study has repeatedly argued for the importance of recognising liminality in academic research, it would be disingenuous at best to overlook the threshold between its two central comparands. In order to compare the *barzakh* and the bardo, an examination of the liminal gap between them seems essential. I argue that this gap consists in liminality, itself. In the context of this dissertation, in other words, a bardo or *barzakh* lies between the bardo and the *barzakh*.

This being the case, it further becomes necessary to examine the ways in which liminality—the threshold or isthmus between comparands—accomplishes its dual functions of unification and differentiation. Its unifying activity is obvious: in their anxiety-provoking disruption of known order, both passages share the unsettling attributes of the liminal. The transformational potential of liminal events is likewise common to both, as are the other similarities listed above. It is thus easy to see how

an isthmus lying between the two seas of the *barzakh* and the bardo unites the two experiences.

Liminality as separating the bardo and the *barzakh* requires a more subtle analysis. It is not enough simply to enumerate the differences between the two. The question, rather, is how the isthmus of liminality may be understood to embody these differences. Here, I propose employing the two terms as synecdoches for their respective spiritual homes: Vajrayana Buddhism and Sufism, respectively. These represent two quite different and distinct religious cultures: on the one hand, a theistic spiritual system rooted in Abrahamic values historically emerging on the Arabian Peninsula, and on the other, a non-theistic Indian tradition imbued with Tibetan shamanism. For each community, the other is indeed Other—that is to say, thoroughly not-Us in language, geography, history, doctrine, practices, nationality, and cultural commitments. While it is certainly the case that Muslims and Buddhists have entered into conflicts, notably in south and southeast Asia,[269] reports of violent engagements specifically between Sufis and Tibetan Buddhists have proven difficult to find. Using a strangely applicable metaphor to describe the relations between Sufism and Buddhism, in fact, one scholar describes a meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the acknowledged leader of all Tibetan Buddhists, and several prominent scholars of Sufism as "a gentle meeting of two oceans".[270]

The peaceful implication of this description is of course no miracle. Few occasions have arisen for Sufis and Vajrayanists to compete over material resources or ideological positionalities. Accordingly, it is not my intention to suggest that the two communities represent some ideal of religious harmony. I propose, rather, to explore the possibilities inhering in the location of a liminal gap, with its typical lack of defined boundaries, squarely in between two long-established identities. Liminality

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[269] For an overview of current conflicts, see Bruno Marshall Shirley, "Buddhist-Muslim Violence in South and South-East Asia: The Local Becomes Regional, or a Clash of Civilizations?" (*International Policy Digest*, 29 Jun 2016, accessed August 27, 2019, https://intpolicydigest.org/2016/06/29/buddhist-muslim-violence-in-south-and-south-east-asia-the-local-becomes-regional-or-a-clash-of-civilizations/).

[270] The scholar is Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland; the occasion, "A Meeting of Two Oceans, Dialogue on Sufism and Buddhism", held at the Roshan Center for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland on May 7, 2013, accessed August 3, 2019, https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/buddhism-islam/the-dalai-lama-in-dialogue-with-sufi-scholars.

as a separative agent, here, obliges each side to embody its own essential nature, for it cannot in itself provide those limits. The liminal isthmus, holding "in itself the power of each" of the conditions on either side of it (Morris 1995, 7), necessarily substantiates that power—which itself lies precisely in their respective identities. Further, "[u]nderstanding the definition of the barzakh is identical to understanding the essence of the activity of defining, which consists of differentiating between things" (Bashir 2004, 87). Its differentiating function, in other words, makes of the liminal an essential factor in the establishment of defining identities on either side of it. Or, to put it yet another way, it is precisely the presence of the liminal that makes any identity possible.

Attributes of Liminality

The foregoing analysis entails a recognition of the unifying action of differentiation. Here, several of liminality's core attributes come into view. For the purposes of this study, I wish to draw attention to three of these attributes: the embrace of extremes; enantiodromia; and paradox. While these characteristics by no means exhaust the nature of the liminal, I submit that they are particularly relevant in the context of religious violence.

First, it might be argued that liminality not only embraces but actually relies on extremes. This argument goes back to the very emphatic polarities of life and death addressed by the conventional understandings of the bardo and the *barzakh*. Beyond that, for Ibn al-'Arabī, a *barzakh* is necessary to rationalise the existence of profound opposites within the relationship between divine and human existence. Similarly, in the Vajrayana tradition, the bardo navigates the territory between the radical extremes of suffering and freedom, or *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna*. In either case, liminality has the capacity to bring together acute polarities—unification and differentiation among them.

In its embrace of extremes, liminality further entails a second attribute: what Heraclitus calls "enantiodromia", or the view that "everything that exists turns into

its opposite" (Jung 1970, 5,496).[271] Enantiodromia is especially apparent where extreme polarities are present. Jung observes that the more extreme a positionality, the more inevitable is this transformative inversion (4,063), which is surely worth considering in the context of religious extremism.

Thirdly, and perhaps most explicitly, liminality is a site of paradox: a coming together of conventionally contradictory phenomena (Thomassen 2014, 92). In the "hyper-reality" of the liminal, structure and meaning fall apart in the very process of informing new structures and meanings (1). Under these conditions, paradox is unavoidable. Conventional logic cannot accommodate or express such simultaneous destruction and creation. The simultaneity of differentiation and unification is but one more paradoxical capacity of the liminal.

Ibn al-'Arabī views differentiation as itself a relationship. As mentioned in Chapter Four, he sees "*the relation of difference from Other*" as no less binding than is the relation of sameness (Bashier 2004, 88; emphasis original). Each side is dependent on the other to assert its identity in contrast. In the decidedly unparadoxical Us-versus-Them situation, however, relationship and differentiation appear mutually exclusive. Thus, those identifying as Us seek to eliminate all relations with Them, including the relation of difference. The only way to eliminate the relation of difference is to unite. Bashir notes that this argument "yields the paradoxical conclusion that by identifying themselves things lose their very identity, since they become other than themselves" (2004, 88).

Here we see enantiodromia in action: at either end of the alternation between unity and separation, its opposite is poised for the extreme to reach its apogee. The three attributes of liminality expounded above are evident in this situation, for the extreme poles of Us and Them are ineluctably drawn into enantiodromiac transformation. The participants' intentions are, paradoxically, thwarted by their very attempts to accomplish them. This self-defeating trajectory recalls the hypothesis of autonomic liminality, posited earlier.

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[271] Enantiodromia is implied in the writings of Heraclitus, and was taken up by psychoanalyst C.G. Jung (Sharp 2001, 45 n27). I am grateful to Dr. Laura Marshall for bringing the concept to my attention.

Further exploration of this paradox turns to the characteristics of Ibn al-'Arabī's *barzakh*. It is to be remembered that this isthmus maintains a consistent integrity within itself even while embodying the characteristics of the seas at either shore. Thus, despite the differences between the respective seas, it does not itself exhibit any dividing line (Chittick 1998, 335). [272] But not only is the *barzakh* indivisible; it renders indivisible the adjoining phenomena. In Ibn al-'Arabī's view, "the separation between the things (defining) and the separating factor (that which defines) become manifest as one in entity" (Bashir 2004, 87). In similar vein, cultural scholar Irén Annus observes that "the construction of difference is simultaneous with the construction of sameness; that is, these two processes are inseparable and are in fact parts of the same whole" (2011, 3). Here we find a resonance with the view of non-duality, in which the distinction between subject and object falls away. In this sense, the liminal might be considered a downright challenge to differentiation. And yet, as demonstrated, even in its indivisibility it functions to divide.

Chittick, examining the inseparability of unity and differentiation from a different angle, considers the nature of *tawhīd*, or the indivisible unity of the Divine. Although *tawhīd* might be considered the ultimate and essential embodiment of unity, Chittick explains that it is necessarily founded on diversity, for unity presupposes an originating multiplicity (1999, 203). In order for phenomena to unite, in other words, they must originally be separate. The *barzakh*, then, differentiates in order to make unity possible (Bashir 2004, 7). This is why the conditions or phenomena flanking the *barzakh* must declare their respective identities in order for the transformational power of liminality to take effect. In the case of the collective identities implicated in religious violence, it may thus be paradoxically more beneficial for conflicted parties to maintain clear boundaries than to compromise those attributes that distinguish them from the Other.[273]

In these expositions, both Bashir and Chittick assert the indivisibility of difference and unity. I understand this to indicate that the *barzakh* embodies this indivisibility.

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[272] Citing *Al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* III 518.1.

[273] See Eisenstadt and Giesen's liminal trichotomy, cited in Chapter Three.

Indivisibility is, therefore, the condition of transformation from difference to unity, and simultaneously, the condition of inherent difference necessary to that transformation. At this point, it might be helpful to recall Ibn al-'Arabī's explanation of the *barzakh* between red and green: while the two are clearly differentiated, as colours they are "one in their luminous substance" (Chittick 1994, 16). In their vividness and radiance as colours—their essential *colourness*, so to speak—red and green are united. Yet their unity at this higher level is enabled by their respective identities as different colours. It is the distinct identity of red that establishes it as a colour; likewise, green. Were everything in the phenomenal world the same colour, that particular attribute would not be recognised as colour. It is because colours are distinct from one another that we are aware of their existence. Just as red and green must differ in order to make the apprehension of colour possible, the liminal gap between the *barzakh* and the bardo is separative precisely because it is unitive.

Bashir approaches the question of unity versus separateness from the viewpoint of ultimate and relative realities, a matter of particular importance in the context of religion. "The consideration of the paradoxical representation of liminal cases", he asserts,

> represents a threshold over which the reality of the divine and the reality of the world, or the Truth and its appearances interact and, through that very interaction, restore the unity of the human knowledge, not for the sake of perpetuating the split in the human consciousness. (Bashir 2004, 18)

A significant qualifier in this account is the centrality of "interaction" as an active, dynamic movement requiring the participation of both elements. The "unity of human knowledge" and "the human consciousness" Bashir references bring the lofty relationship between ultimate and relative reality squarely into the everyday world of people, where that relationship acquires meaning. Accordingly, I argue that the dynamism of the interactivity Bashir describes extends to the human realm, where the "principle of non-otherness" inherent in the *barzakh* comes into play (Burckhardt 1979, 1). Although this principle might, in some other context, imply the fundamental commonality of all peoples, I suggest that here it could be read as "non-other*ing*".

This transformation from principle to activity accords with the experiential, and hence dynamic, nature of both the bardo and the *barzakh*. They are processes, rather than destinations. Non-othering, in this register, implies an active choosing with respect to human interaction, as opposed to an ideological or doctrinal orientation. This, again, recalls the energetic nature of liminality itself. I argue that recognising the liminal necessarily implies the choice entailed in non-othering, and in this way holds the potential to defuse the conflicts arising out of attempts by Us to either engulf or eliminate Them.

Paradox and Identity

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued against fixating on perceived certainties. I have demonstrated how an understanding of liminality opposes the possibility of static conditions. And yet I submit that clear declarations of religious identity might in fact contribute to a softening of violent positionalities. This is precisely because of what liminality has to teach us about extremes, enantiodromia, and paradox.

In order to accomplish its transformational function, the isthmus of liminality separating the seas of the bardo and the *barzakh* requires stability on either side of it: van Gennep's preliminal separation and post-liminal incorporation phases. Only when there is clarity regarding what, exactly, is being simultaneously united and separated can the liminal event proceed from the extremes of differentiation to enantiodromia and subsequent unity. By the same token, the differentiated elements must pass through liminality in order to attain unity. I propose, therefore, that when religious identity is available to liminal transformation it might in fact function to calm rather than escalate conflict. To acknowledge and support claims of unique and disparate identities on the part of adversaries is to endorse the extreme positionalities necessary for the process of enantiodromia to proceed.

If religious violence is a liminal outburst or a reaction to liminal events, as I have argued, it follows that solutions are not to be found in attempts to reconcile doctrinal, traditional, or ritual differences. To apply the analytical lens of liminality, by contrast, necessitates a close examination of the corresponding dynamics, including, as mentioned, the presence of extremes, enantiodromia, and paradox. This is perhaps one way to describe the essential role of context in any investigation of religious

violence.

Perhaps more to the point, though, I suggest that the application of such an analytical lens is incommensurate with attempts to bring order to the associated disruption. Viewed as a natural and inevitable eruption of liminality, the disruption characteristic of religious violence might reveal a certain wisdom, however distorted in its expression. Whether or not this proves to be the case, I submit that an inflexibly oppositional stance toward violence is likely to obscure any valuable clues that are otherwise overlooked in the liminal chaos.

A poster advertising a meditation programme features a stereotypical guru type—a bearded old man in a *dhoti*—on a surfboard. The caption reads, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf". Since the best efforts of scholars, diplomats, and others to end religious violence have yet to prove their long-term effectiveness, it might perhaps make sense to embrace it on its own, chaotic terms; to learn, in other words, to surf the choppy seas of religious violence. To continue searching for resolution by stopping the waves may ultimately result in analyses "that have been distorted into clarity" (Law 2004, 2). Liminality, in its lack of clarity, challenges the observer to embrace the very uncertainty so emphatically dismissed by fixated religionists.

Accordingly, my textual comparison itself consists in a *barzakh* or bardo. It resists arrival at a concluding point, for as Ibn al-'Arabī cautions, to do so "is to kill" the investigation. For him, "there is no closure, only *dis*closure" (Chittick 1998, xi; emphasis original). I have endeavoured, therefore, to avoid Law's "[distortion] into clarity" in favour of broadening the field of investigation into religious violence. I argue that the indeterminacy of this approach reflects the indeterminacy—the messiness—of reality. Once again, I invoke the wisdom of poetry:

> Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
> Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
> For ever and forever when I move.
> How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
> To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use![274]

[274] Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses", accessed August 8, 2019, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45392/ulysses.

The speaker, Ulysses, is an inveterate traveller. Despite his old age and his responsibilities as ruler of a kingdom, he elects to continue exploring unknown territories whose "margin" (one of Turner's terms for the liminal [Turner 1969, 94]) —refuses to be fixed. He fantasises about reaching "the Happy Isles" where warriors go to their reward, but his central inspiration is the voyage of discovery itself.

As scholars, we may perhaps likewise derive more satisfaction, and produce ever more surprising results by "[shining] in use". Continual discovery, by definition, opposes tidy conclusions. The indeterminate nature of liminality offers just such an adventure, replete with the dangers attendant on entering unknown worlds. Nonetheless, I propose that recognising and exploring the liminal events in our own work may support unforeseen innovation in the academic treatment of religious violence.

Liminality as Hermeneutic

Once again, as in previous chapters, I argue for the application of a liminal lens to the academic research on religious violence. This is not based on technical considerations, but on the possibly apocryphal but nonetheless persuasive Einstein quote cited in the previous chapter. The consciousness that creates a problem is unlikely to generate its solution. Accordingly, it is my observation that the Us-and-Them construction driving much contemporary religious violence is pervasive throughout modern Western culture, including, inevitably, the academy. I suggest that those of us dedicated to understanding and analysing conflict of any kind might find that applying to our own work the arguments against dualistic, hierarchical judgements leads to a more fluid engagement of academic investigation. Perhaps we may enter the "realm of social possibility" invoked by Rumelili, above.

Academic researchers are no more or less susceptible to divisive, judgemental

thinking than is anyone else. Every one of us is captive to the forces driving both our attraction to and our involvement in the dynamics that shape group identity. We all entertain assumptions and logics, often unwittingly, that colour our research. Saler offers a pithy encapsulation of the problem as it manifests in his own discipline:

> In short, the practitioners of a mostly Western profession (anthropology) employ a Western category (religion), conceptualized as a component of a larger Western category (culture), to achieve their professional goal of coming to understand what is meaningful and important for non-Western peoples. (Saler 2000, 8)

Saler's reference to Western academia versus "non-Western peoples" applies only partially to the scholarship on religious violence, but his point holds good in that all scholarship is influenced by unwitting, and therefore unquestioned, assumptions that are deeply rooted in cultural norms—as well as by tested views and positions that are foundational to our respective disciplines and communities of practice. We are born on a gameboard whose existence is opaque to us until we learn that other games exist. It is as though, raised on a Monopoly board, we eagerly transfer to a newly discovered Scrabble board and try to learn who holds the bank while searching in vain for the dice. Again, our scholarly understandings of religion, however sincerely and diligently interrogated, are "filtered through [our] social mind concepts" (Boyer 2001, 269). For this reason, the reflective interiority I argued for in Chapter Six is central to any real shift in the animating logic of violence.

Runkle proposes that violence is not bad if it is employed in order to "maximize the good, minimize the bad, and distribute them justly". The obvious flaw in this argument is that opposing sides define good, bad, and justice quite differently. In the case of religious violence, appeals to a higher authority routinely reinforce competing God's-eye definitions of such values. Runkle does conclude that strong feelings against violence tend to compromise the best-intentioned efforts to mitigate it (1976, 389). Here, his argument and mine concur.

Anthony Judge is a prolific researcher and encyclopaedist who specialises in international organisational strategy and policy. Judge impatiently dismisses "the bloody stupidity which continues to characterize the ongoing dynamics between 'us' and 'them'". In his view, "we all play our roles and occupy conditions" in these

ubiquitous and pervasive dynamics. Significantly, Judge notes that most of us are largely unconscious of the ways in which we compulsively reinforce them, suggesting that "our collective mindset" might be fruitfully examined for its culpability in fuelling the ongoing cycles of violence plaguing our planet (2009).

My earlier argument offers a liminal analysis of religious violence that is specifically inclusive and hence incommensurate with the Us-and-Them construction. But exclusivity is not the only hazard implicit in binary analyses. The tacit side-taking in Us-and-Them, Judge notes, "precludes exploration of more complex frameworks" (2009). Partiality over-simplifies issues rich with potential for more nuanced investigation.

Among the pressing global issues that suffer from the absence of a more subtle analysis is the altercation between the Palestinian and Israeli factions in the Middle East. Judge believes that "binary logic" may be the stumbling block to progressing beyond fixation on the touted but thus far unproductive "two-state solution" to that conflict (2009). I suspect that this same binary logic obstructs innovation in the theoretical contemplation of religious violence.

For cognitive scientist George Lakoff, constructs such as the "two-state solution" in the Middle East are among countless "frames": mental structures that contain both emotional and intellectual content. Other such frames include "the war on terror", "teenage drug abuse", and "rags to riches". Frames develop from neural activity sparked by repeated exposure to associated tropes, and they routinely impose narratives and judgements on our moment-to-moment experience (2009, 22). Ninety-eight percent of this process occurs unconsciously, while the rational mind accounts for just 2 percent of our ideological convictions (197; see also Teehan 2015, 14).

This framing applies as much to perpetrators of religious violence as to anyone else. The conscious justifications for their hostility to the Other are informed by a vastly more complex and extensive repository of unconscious activity. Following Lakoff's argument, however, the same lopsided and dangerously occult unreason applies to us academic researchers. Like the religious extremists we study, we ourselves are driven by unexamined cultural, societal, and personal fixations. To free our minds from this unconscious control requires that "we must make the unconscious conscious"

(Lakoff 2009, 19). In other words, the practice of reflective interiority is central to a clear understanding of any phenomenon—including religious violence, its dynamics, and its perpetrators.

Making the unconscious conscious entails a certain amount of discomfort. There are reasons, after all, why we bury certain material beneath the radar of consciousness. Extreme examples of such tendencies are evident in coping mechanisms associated with traumatic events, which include "repression, dissociation, splitting, displacement, and denial and fantasy" (Stein 1993, 73). Distress tends to trigger mental and emotional reactions that distort both our memories of the precipitating event and our attempts at relief.

Following William James's methodology in exploring extreme examples as best supporting the analysis of human psychology (1902, 40), I submit that the dynamic described here may extend beyond the arena of actual trauma. It may, in fact, consist in forms much subtler and more difficult to identify than in the cases of abuse and injury typically cited with respect to clinical repression. All of us carry the unconscious residue of past embarrassments, regrets, insults, and reversals. All of us preserve some sense of identity at the expense of complete historical transparency. By the same token, a price is exacted for allowing repressed material to surface. The discomfort associated with making the unconscious conscious is the discomfort of the liminal passage.

In an article proposing a fundamental paradigm shift in the academic field of deep psychology, Robert Jay Lifton describes

> the deep uneasiness, bordering on despair, of large numbers of practitioners and investigators as they experience threats to the validity of the existing classical paradigm along with an absence of a new paradigm sufficiently powerful to replace it; the widely felt though often inchoate sense that we are losing rather than gaining ground in our struggles to cope professionally with the increasingly formidable social and psychological forces that confront us; and the atmosphere of chaotic eclecticism, within which it becomes difficult indeed to distinguish narrow dogma and intensified cultism from sustained commitment, superficiality from bold experiment, and excessive claim from genuine accomplishment. (Lifton 1975, 43)

Lifton's account may be considered a textbook description of a liminal passage.

Terms such as “deep uneasiness”, “threats to the validity of the existing … paradigm”, “absence of a new paradigm”, “inchoate sense”, “losing … ground”, “chaotic eclecticism”, and “difficult … to distinguish” all echo the descriptions cited above in Chapter Three.

The distress Lifton so eloquently describes may not affect every pioneering researcher, but it is in our best interests to anticipate and prepare for such a possibility. As indicated in previous chapters, genuine transformation occurs precisely in dependence on the experience of liminality. An exploration of liminal dynamics may open significant and productive avenues in academic research.

Here again, to recognise the “deep uneasiness” Lifton describes in the context of scholarly research is to engage in precisely the reflective interiority I have suggested in the context of religious fixation. Just as the perpetrator of religious violence might achieve some ventilation of dogmatic insistence through contemplating the *barzakh*, the bardo, or their equivalents in other religious traditions, so, likewise, might the scholar of religious violence cultivate a critical curiosity regarding her own views of right and wrong, good and evil, violence and non-violence.

As I have argued, a shift from such binary logic to a more inclusive, less fixed analytical approach cannot be accomplished by cognitive means alone. Precisely because fixation on binary structures is a mode of being, access to deeper levels of ontological engagement are required to relax one’s grip on perceived certainties. Liminality—in the forms of the bardo and the *barzakh*, but also in a more general sense—invites us, as individuals, to explore possibilities of profound personal transformation. Since collectives comprise individuals, such transformation holds the promise of larger shifts in consciousness, which may in fact be the best hope of our survival as a species.[275]

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[275] See, for example, Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) and Daniel Schmachtenberger, “Utopia or Bust: Designing a Non Self-Terminating Civilization”, interview with Daniel Thorson on *Emerge* podcast, August 5, 2019, accessed September 22, 2019, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/daniel-schmachtenberger-utopia-or-bust-designing-non/id1057220344?i=1000446185037.

The Value of This Study

Terrorist organisations claiming religious inspiration were unknown prior to 1980; now, as we know, these are widespread. The proportion of civil wars based on religious conflict has risen from 22 percent in the 1960s to a current level of 50 percent (Toft 2013, 337). Religious violence continues to escalate worldwide. A tremendous amount of scholarship has been generated in response to this phenomenon; its aetiology, historical significance, and philosophical underpinnings have been extensively explored. Fields as wide-ranging as political science, sociology, anthropology, and literature have been mined for potential solutions to the increasingly vexing problem of religious violence. The frightening escalation in religious tensions and conflicts worldwide suggests that, while much has been accomplished in our understanding of the dynamics of religious violence, the scholarship on the phenomenon is incomplete.

I have sought, in this study, to suggest an analytical approach that may be applied to both those who perpetrate religious violence and those who study it. First, I propose that greater awareness of, education about, and attention to the liminal praxes embedded in religious traditions might influence the ways religious practitioners understand violence. The ontological implications of such praxes, in particular, may serve to moderate the ideological fixities underpinning the divide between Us and Them. The implicit non-duality of a liminally informed view could conceivably soften exclusivist positionalities, minimising the perception of confrontation.

I realise that urging a fixated religionist to see the world through a novel lens is more likely to produce anamorphosis than it is a change of heart. Nonetheless, I propose that an insistence on a desired or ideal outcome is of as little value coming from the academic Us as it is from the violent Them. Most, if not all, changes in societal and cultural paradigms begin with an idea. This study offers one such idea.

Second, though not secondarily, I argue for a shift of emphasis in the scholarship on religious violence: a shift, perhaps, “from analysis to form” (Lifton 1975); that is, from exclusive reliance on method to the same reflective interiority I have imagined entering the calculus of religious extremists. Following the thinking of both Lifton

and Lakoff in their respective fields, I propose that scholars of religious studies contemplate the impact of their own positionalities on the subjects of their research.

This is not an original, or even a new, idea. Christine Morley, a scholar of social work who has written extensively on this approach, describes it as "self reflection on how internalized dialogue has been constructed, and can, therefore, be deconstructed, changed and reconstructed". Significantly, Morley notes that such critical reflection is particularly useful in research that aspires to "emancipatory aims" (2008, 266). The goals of non-violence surely reflect this aspiration.

I argue that one important aspect of critical self-reflection for academics in this field might be recognition of our influence on the activism that seeks to mitigate religious violence. Although a given scholar may not see herself as actively working to staunch the proliferation of religious violence, her work is assuredly contributing to the body of research employed by activists in the field. Any implicit, unexamined assumptions informing her work will likely enter into the analytical orthodoxy that eventually shapes the understanding of all involved, and thus also the means employed to curtail the incidence of violence.

Not surprisingly, some researchers find any departure from a traditional, positivist theoretical stance in the social sciences responsible for "a great deal of intellectual and methodological turmoil" (Goodman 1998, 51). Melucci likewise recognises the "uncertainty" faced by researchers dedicated to "testing the limits of their instruments and of their ethical values" (1995, 62).The turmoil and uncertainty described here are, again, characteristic of liminality. Yet Morley argues that such distress notwithstanding, to embrace "a range of non-traditional, richer ways of knowing people's experiences" is to free ourselves of fixed conceptual positions and tap into the potential for as-yet unexplored directions (2008, 266).

In Lifton's view, researchers confront a peculiarly difficult challenge in navigating the "psychohistorical dislocation" in their disciplinary paradigm shift while simultaneously bearing responsibility for making it intelligible to others (1975, 43). I submit that we scholars of religious violence face a parallel hazard: the difficulty of challenging extreme dualistic views of good and evil, right and wrong, Us and Them, while ourselves inevitably influenced by these same dualisms. Cultural repugnance

toward violence as bad/evil is pervasive and widely supported in both the popular media[276] and academic research.[277] Speaking of the activities of the so-called Islamic State, for example, political philosopher Simona Forti observes:

> If we were to write of its violence as being merely irrational or even barbaric, our condemnation wouldn't resonate as strongly in the popular imagination. Presenting the violence in terms of "evil" not only ensures that the fight against it is imperative, it also places us, unreservedly, on the right side of moral history. (Evans and Forti 2016)

Forti goes on to argue that the complexities of morality and ethics challenge absolutism; and that even those actions that seem most unequivocally savage may be motivated by a sincere, if distorted, reverence for life. In her view, our best hope of resolving the problem of violence "is to critically question everything that happens before this utterly asymmetrical relationship between the perpetrators of violence and their absolute victims develops" (Evans and Forti 2016)—in other words, to interrupt the automatic leap into a dualistic, and thus oppositional, worldview. Although Forti's caution here specifically addresses the bifurcation of perpetrator and victim, I submit that the same evil-versus-good construction applies to the perpetrators and scholars of violence. Those of us who study religious violence are, for the most part, confident of our location "on the right side of moral history" relative to the subjects of our research. Since, as argued earlier, dualistic thinking lies at the root of violence, it behooves those of us charged with clarifying the issue for others to examine the dualism in our own thinking—even in the face of the strong potential for losing our status as one of the righteous Us.

I argue, therefore, that the same reflective interiority that may benefit those who perpetrate overt violence is incumbent upon those of us who seek to understand and mitigate that violence. We might begin with challenging the designation of "evil" in both popular and academic discourse. As scholar of political violence Brad Evans

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[276] See, for example, David D. Courtwright, "Violence inAmerica", *American Heritage* 47 no.5, 1996, accessed August 7, 2019, https://www.americanheritage.com/violence-america.

[277] According to moral philosopher Susan Neiman, "the problem of evil is the guiding force of modern thought" (*Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015], 2–3).

points out, to call another "evil" is essentially an assertion of moral absolutism, which in turn shuts down meaningful communication (Evans and Forti 2016).

Where to from Here?

The two examples I have offered of liminality's role in religious violence do not constitute my central argument. Rather, I wish to demonstrate the utility of liminality as an analytical lens in the study of violence, and specifically, violence in which religion is implicated. I hope to have laid sufficient groundwork to inspire other scholars to delve more deeply into the relationship of liminality to religious violence.

Further, the *barzakh* and the bardo are only two examples of liminal passages embedded in established religious tradition. I expect that many such examples are to be found in traditions other than Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism.[278] There may well be insights to be gained from the nuances available in those examples. In any event, I believe that the discovery and explication of liminal passages in a broader cross-section of religious traditions will help drive home the message that religion is not antipathetic to ambivalence, uncertainty, and even chaos. Bringing more attention to this aspect of religious tradition, while it may not convince religious extremists of the benefits of relaxing their fixations, may over time begin to introduce some movement in otherwise static, monolithic understandings of religious orthodoxy. It may also help shift the locus of attention from conceptual fixation to the necessity of personal transformation: to an appreciation, in other words, of one's mode of being as a compelling expression of spiritual authenticity.

Finally, I suspect that the use of liminality as an analytical tool may help loosen academic logjams in fields other than that of religious violence. May this study, and responses to it within the religious studies arena, inspire the application of liminality as a *barzakh* between disciplinary domains, sharpening their respective boundaries while simultaneously encouraging recognition of those commonalities that may prove fruitful to all.

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[278] The doctrines regarding Roman Catholic purgatory and Jewish *Nehar di-Nur/Gehinnom* may offer promising avenues of exploration.

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